

## **Episode 207—Dr. Julie Dodge, Dr. Christie Bernklau Halvor, and Dr. Sonja Vegdahl: Using Gamification in Social Work Education**

[00:00:08] Welcome to inSocialWork, the podcast series of the University at Buffalo School of Social Work at [www.inSocialWork.org](http://www.inSocialWork.org). We're glad you could join us today. The purpose of inSocialWork is to engage practitioners and researchers in lifelong learning and to promote research to practice and practice to research. We educate. We connect. We care. We're inSocialWork.

[00:00:37] Hello, my name is Charles Syms and this is inSocialWork. Online coursework has become a principal approach for the delivery of education and training to professional social workers in the United States. The proliferation of online courses as well as educational and training programs is certainly a testament to this change in the social work educational pedagogy. As these courses and programs grow, more and more faculty will be asked to teach using platforms and instructional methods that they are unfamiliar with. One of these instructional methods is known as Gamification. As described in this podcast, Gamification is not game based learning, but instead uses game-like features in an educational environment. Today's guests are members of the Concordia University Social Work Program faculty. In 2015 each decided to incorporate some gamification elements into a course they were teaching. In this podcast our guests will explore that experience. Julie Dodge, Ph.D. taught a practice course and Christie Bernklau Halvor, Ph.D. taught a policy course. Both are associate professors in the social work program. Sonja Vegdahl, Ph.D. directs the social work program and also teaches a capstone class for students in their final semester. In this presentation our guests engage in a wide ranging discussion about their experience integrating game-like features into the courses they taught. They explain what is a gamification. They also review some of the relevant research on incorporating these elements into educational settings. Doctors Dodge, Bernklau Halvor and Vegdahl describe what the game of fight assignments looked like in their courses as well as what they hoped to accomplish using these elements. They address how they assess their gamified courses and share findings from their evaluations. The interview concludes with thoughts from our guests on how the use of gamification influenced their teaching and additionally they offer some advice and thoughts for those considering integrating these educational strategies. Doctors Dodge, Bernklau Halvor and Vegdahl were interviewed in June 2016 by Steve Sturman JD, instructional support specialist at the University at Buffalo School of Social Work.

[00:03:31] Hello I'm Steve Sturman, an instructional designer at the University at Buffalo School of Social Work. Today we will be talking about the concept of Gamification and social work education. With me today are Sonja Vegdahl, Julie Dodge, and Christie Bernklau Halvor. Hello everyone and thank you for being here today.

[00:03:53] Hello.

[00:03:54] Thanks for having me.

[00:03:56] Hi.

[00:03:56] To get us started, why don't you tell us a little bit about your program and how you got interested in gamification?

[00:04:03] I'm going to take that first question. This is Julie Dodge and we are all part of the Bachelor of Social Work program at Concordia University in Portland, Oregon. All of our students are on ground students and we have been working to kind of figure out what are new innovations we can bring into our programs. Our mission is to educate a diverse population of students to prepare them for transformation of society and transformation in social justice. Our students are

often nontraditional students. They vary in age, employment status, there are a lot of parents, a wide range people of different cultural backgrounds, first generation students and so on and compared to our partner institutions locally we probably have more nontraditional students than others. So we have worked diligently to try and create creative educational structure that allows people to take classes in concentrated time periods as opposed to having to come to campus every day and so on. We have about 80 students in our program and to get up to 100 and a small portion of our students are part-time. Each of our required classes are offered each semester and students move through the program at their own pace. About a year ago, So in spring of 2015, I was developing a new course and teaching social work skills in a range of subjects, addictions mental health crisis intervention and interpersonal violence and looking for a creative way to offer all of that in a single class. And I was approached by our new Chief Innovation Officer to see if I'd be interested in participating in a pilot or a study on a gameification platform that we had a contract with called Resly. And so yeah I was very excited about that. And then I mentioned it to Sonja and Christie and they were like "Well can we do it to?" And so our whole department signed on to integrate the Resly gamification platform into three different social work classes. And as part of that we agreed to do some research and look at how does this affect student learning. So that's kind of how we got involved.

[00:06:08] That sounds like a big task.

[00:06:11] It was a big task.

[00:06:12] Yes. Can you tell us a little bit more about what exactly gamification is?

[00:06:17] This is Sonja Vegdahl. Gamification is using game-like features in non gaming situations. In education it's used to engage and motivate students and to improve their learning. Gamification is different from game based learning which uses a whole game and kind of a self-contained game space to accomplish learning goals. An example of that would be developing empathy for refugees by taking on the role of a refugee in a video game. So gamification is not that. It's using features of gaming in nongaming situations. So some common things that gamification employs would be a visually pleasing interface, badges and awards, Progress Bars that show a visualization of student's progress, leaderboards that has the points of the different students in the class which can provide public recognition of success but can also foster a competition between students as they see where their classmates are. It can include levels. It often has clear definitions of success, often gives students a choice of learning and activities provides, timely feedback and can include the use of avatars and profiles. So gamification uses one or more of those features.

[00:07:30] The real goal is to help motivate the students in their learning process?

[00:07:36] The ultimate goal is to increase students learning, and gamification is one way to motivate students to learn and then that will increase their learning or to engage students that might not otherwise be engaged in the material, which ultimately that would lead to increased learning.

[00:07:51] Does it look at intrinsic or extrinsic motivation or is it kind of like a mix of both?

[00:07:58] It looks at both of them and research on gamification as in the early stages and it's made more complex because researchers are measuring different combinations of those potential gamification elements such as levels, badges, progress bars and most research on gamification focuses on three areas and motivation and engagement and learning that we were just talking about in terms of motivation. Research suggests that gamification can increase motivation when the task is boring and it increases the extrinsic motivation, so when a student is not particularly interested in learning about something when they get rewards or they see something on the gamification platform that can make them more interested. But students that come to a subject matter with intrinsic

motivation or to a particular learning activity may become less motivated to learn when gamification is applied. So that's kind of interesting.

[00:08:54] It must be a tough balance to work out there.

[00:08:58] Right. And this is early early stages of research and gamification in general but that is one finding that research just showed us. And then also gamification impacts motivation for different students differently including with students that are extrinsically motivated or intrinsically motivated to a particular learning activity. And a second area that research I gamification is focused on is engagement so helping students become absorbed in a task. Some studies demonstrate that gamification increases student engagement. Other studies show that over time the impact of gamification engagement may lessen. The competitive aspect of gamification make some students work harder and become more engaged and others not. And one study suggests that even when engagement is increased the final performance has not necessarily improved. So student may become more engaged in an activity but they don't learn anymore.

[00:09:50] OK.

[00:09:50] And then the third area for research is learning which really is what we want the most and there is evidence for increased learning for those participating in gam-based learning particularly when the content is dry Gamification can increase learning. But other studies show there's no evidence for increased learning when gamification is employed and the impact on learning appears to greatly depends on the learner.

[00:10:13] This is Julie Dodge. So there is that general research on Gamification but I think Resly offered some research. Christie did you want to talk about that?

[00:10:21] Sure, yeah. When we did our training with Resly, so summer of 2015, in addition to the practical training they gave us some data that they had gathered. Dr Chris Haskell he teaches at Boise State University. He's one of the code designers of the Resly platform and it's part of his dissertation research. He compared outcome data from two classes, same subject same content one course was taught in a traditional method and the other course was taught completely gamified using Resly specifically. And we were excited by a few of the outcomes related to student engagement. What they found was that students in the gamified section of the class they completed more coursework. On average they did coursework above and beyond what was required to receive an A. Over 65 percent of the students did work above what was required to receive an A. And students also completed the entire course in less time. So that was promising. And then there was one piece about data that raised some questions of concerns for us. They reported that in the traditional section of the class 71 percent of students were defined as succeeding but that meant was that 71 percent of the students got an A, B or C in the class. Then they looked at the game aside section of the class and 93 percent of students succeeded. So 93 percent compared to 71 percent. But that 93 percent of student success meant that all the students received an A because they had earned enough points in the class. And that meant you got an A. So you either, you did the work demonstrated the knowledge and skills and you won and you got an A or you didn't, in which case of course you didn't pass the class. So it's very competency based which we definitely like the idea of in some way. But there isn't any grade differentiation if you do that method of gaming completely. And so we had some concerns based off of that research because we, and we can maybe talk about that later, but we wanted to maximize choice we wanted students to learn from failure but we weren't prepared to offer a class where it was either an A or a fail.

[00:12:29] I can see how that would be a challenge. I'm not sure that the students would like that either.

[00:12:34] The 93 percent might be very happy.

[00:12:37] So what was it that you were hoping to accomplish with your classes by including these gamified elements in your class?

[00:12:45] This is Julie Dodge. So in my course I took the course I have this as I mentioned this BSW skills course in which we're addressing crisis intervention, interpersonal violence, addiction and mental health. And the goal of that was to give my students the skills to recognize signs and symptoms of each of those issues and have basic intervention skills and know how to refer those appropriately with, according to the bachelor's level skill level. And so knowing that this was such a wide wide range of things to cover, I mean that, that would be a whole lot of textbooks if I was just going to use textbooks. So my goal was to use the gamification platform to provide them with information and access to both text type information, reading information as well as videos and other options were they would be able to identify what those skills are, see people using and practicing these skills and then they had Quests in class and on their own where they would practice those skills.

[00:13:44] And this is Christie Bernklau Halvor, I'll jump in. I gamified a social welfare policy class and I had a slightly different reasons. I had two main purposes. One is that I wanted the hybridise of course because we'd been talking as a program about wanting to experiment with hybridization because we thought for many of our transfer students who have to commute to campus it might be really helpful. They didn't have to commute every week. And so as I thought about hybridizing I thought social policy was a good place to start because the students are already online and out in the community quite a bit. So I decide to use Resly and gamification to have a platform for hybridising, and then my second reason was that I wanted to find more ways to increase student interest and engagement in policy and politics because politics is notoriously viewed negatively by many social work students. They're either intimidated or uninterested in it. And so I'm always looking for ways to offer more choices and tap into their interests and it seems like gamification and quests would be worth trying.

[00:14:47] And this is Sonja. And I used it in a capstone class that students take their last semester at Concordia and it's called the Professional Social Worker and I was just interested in having heard a lot about different options for teaching and learning, music, technology and other methods. I just wanted to try something different and kind of shake things up a little bit so I thought well this would be a way to try out some different things and get some good training and see how applying a different approach could engage students and enhance their learning.

[00:15:19] That sounds like three really diverse different courses. Could you give us some concrete examples of what the gamification looked like in each of those courses?

[00:15:30] Absolutely. We'll take it in the same order. So this is Julie Dodge. So in the BSW skills class we integrated classroom lectures that was focused on things that I wasn't including in the gamification platform in the gamification platform. I gave them a lot of exposure to videos of people modeling different crisis intervention skills, recognizing coping skills, recognizing defense mechanisms, seeing people interviewing people with addictions and mental health concerns, they could start to see this is what it looks like. So they really had that opportunity to interact and so that for the quests that involved videos they would watch the videos, tell me which videos they watched and then respond to some key question. What were the dreams that you observed or what were the differences you observed between these different things. And then some of those quests, the great thing about Gamification, so the way I set my own up 80 percent of the course grade was attached to completing these quests in the game platform and there were, I had some quests that were

required that based on what I was trying to accomplish and what the learning goals. I believed that those quests would demonstrate the basic skills that they were to learn. And then they had a higher set of where they could complete where they could choose to specialize and focus on either one area of mental health or an area of addictions where they looked more into a specific area of addictions like use of depressants and they would create a fact sheet that they could then hopefully save and use for their later research. But it would allow them to do some research on their own, but they could also specialize in the thing that they found interesting. Likewise for mental health. And then we also had what Resly is built in they call them group quests. And I had a number of group quests where they would role play together in class where I was also able to observe and give them a thumbs up to practicing the different crisis intervention skills, suicide intervention skills and recognising and referring addiction and mental health. So they would do those together and then they would, they would give each other feedback in the Resly platform on how their interviewing skills was and that's how they completed those quests. Very practical.

[00:17:39] How did the students perceive that? Once they were completed with the quest did they get a badge or did they get points towards a leader board? Did you integrate any of those types of concepts?

[00:17:50] Absolutely. So each quest, depending on kind of how much time it takes to invest you kind of assign more points to those that are more complex and take more time so that they had for each quest that they complete they earn a certain number of points. You could earn a maximum of 800 points that could be applied to your grade in my class, although there were almost 11 hundred points worth of quests available that allowed them some choice. But each time they completed a quest, when they submit it there'd be a little bell that rang that said "Ding! It's done!" and then once if it was Quest that didn't require approval from the instructor, so Resly offers that option where you can need to require approval or not. So in some of those more basic ones I didn't require approval but on the more complicated ones I did. And I would give feedback and I could return it to them and say "hey this isn't quite cutting it." So they could go back and redo it until they got it right. They get that. And then after they have completed a certain number of quests then they can earn a badge and then for each badge there and then they can level up to a higher rewards level platforms.

[00:18:57] That's very interesting.

[00:18:58] And I contribute with social welfare policy and this is Christie Berklau Halvor. I mentioned before that I hybridized the class. So it's always been a 15 week class that meets three hours once a week and with the Resly platform I had the students come on site nine of the weeks and then six of the weeks they completed their course time remotely mostly using quests from the platform and I could probably hybridise of course even more but I just started with the content that I thought would actually be better online and gamified than it was in the class setting. So I did that, I hybridized it and then I also used it to try and just more effectively teach in general in a couple ways. So one of the ways was trying to increase student choice. So a number of times throughout the semester I'd set up a group of quests and the students could choose a particular number to complete. For example the first week of the class included in their homework was a set of eight quests that I called I Care Quests and I was trying to tap into areas of policy or politics that the students might find interesting and I asked them to complete two of the eight quests. Most of the students seemed to pick which two they completed based on the topic that interested them most, so there were things like minimum wage or criminal justice reform, police and mental illness, that kind of thing. And then at the end of each question they would answer three questions that let me do the assessment that I needed to do so. Do they understand different levels of policy, Can they appreciate the way that policy impacts vulnerable people, that kind of thing. But they got to get to those questions through a topic that interested them. And then I also heard from students that some of them chose their quest not based on the topic but based on the way that they wanted to learn. So

some of those I Care Quests used to videos, others used interactive websites, others had some pretty traditional reading or some independent online research. There were a lot of different ways that they could interact with content and so from students they cared more about that choice than the actual topic. That was one way. The one of thing I'd mention about a planned game games location the policy was anyone out there who has taught policy knows that there's a lot of social welfare history content that it's expected that we cover. So I used to cover that in person over two to three weeks, which meant the three hour chunks of time in a classroom talking about history and that a lot of just knowledge and long blocks of time. And it goes against everything that we know from neuroscience about how people learn well. So I thought that gamification would be ideal and the online platform would be ideal because I could use Camtasia, create short videos, break the content down and then the students could do these shorter quests space them out over the two to three weeks. Do it when and where they wanted to. And then they would benefit from getting to space it out. They get to do some online quizzes along with it. They could pace it at a way that worked for them so students who learn slower could pause the video repeat it take it at their pace. I also heard from students who learn faster that they appreciate being able to go at their fast pace and not be slowed down in the classrooms. Those are some of the main ways that I applied it.

[00:22:07] Can I also add, Christie didn't you as part of yours provide some instruction on how to take notes while they're watching those videos?

[00:22:15] Yes the students would watch the videos and then they would have guided notes which comes from, again from neuroscience about giving basic topics and questions and having students fill it in, so the part of the notes are done for them part of it they're doing, so they're benefiting from listening, writing, having some guidance on in terms of what's most important.

[00:22:35] This Sonja Vegdahl. I applied it in yet a third way. made my class a professional social worker. I wanted to encourage my students to try out different self care practices and the self care quests made up 25 percent of the students' grade in my course. Initially they all had to do a quest that was a self care assessment and they use some different tools and once they finished that then they could choose from a variety of self care quests. There were two types. One were the bigger quests, and these were on practices such as gratitude, exercise, creativity, mindfulness, relaxation, nutrition, etc. These requests were in two parts. First they learned about the evidence base for the benefits of that specific practice and they set personalized goals around that, and then when they completed that then a new quest would open up and they could do two weeks of that self care practice, keeping a journal and reflecting at the end on the impact of that practice in their lives. And then they could tend to jump around and do different ones. And then I also had smaller quests and these are just kind of a one part quick do reflect such as taking a walk in nature, writing a single letter of self compliment to themselves, developing an emergency health care plan or watching a movie and reflecting on that. So they would get points as the combination of the bigger quests or the smaller quests.

[00:23:56] How did you assess the effectiveness of the schemified elements in your class?

[00:24:02] This is Christie, I'll explain that briefly. It's probably important to first say that we did do the normal course evaluations. We received verbal feedback from students, we had lots of conversations among ourselves, all those things that we typically do in classes so we do have some insight from that but we also did a formal research project along with it. And the formal research project involved two focus groups. So at the end of the fall semester, fall 2015 we invited all the students who had been in any of our three gamified courses to participate in a focus group and then we did it again at the end of the Spring 2016 semester. So we had to focus groups. By the time we had the spring focus group, most of those students had taken two or three of the gamified classes and we asked qualitative questions. It was very exploratory, mostly focused around student

engagement and their own perception of their learning. We had an administrator to facilitate the focus group so that the person wasn't connected to the social work program and we don't know which students attended. But we do know how many students attended and we know how many from each class and that type of thing. So we've, we've finished analyzing the data from the fall focus group that we have set and then we're in the middle of analyzing the Spring focus group data so we can share the results and it's pretty complete but I just say it's not final.

[00:25:20] So what did you find from your research?

[00:25:24] This is Julie and I'm going to take a look at the extrinsic stuff. The students responded well to positive reinforcement. They liked things like earning badges and I think each of us tried to be creative in creating badges that were kind of cool looking somewhat.

[00:25:40] You had the coolest looking badges, Julie.

[00:25:45] One of the students in one of the focus groups talked about how she would get excited whenever she would get a badge and she'd take a screenshot and post it on her Facebook page so that impacted some folks. Many of my students, and it came out the focus groups as well, talked about the sounds when they would submit their quest and it would give them this little built thing and they're like "Yay!", so they liked the sounds and they liked seeing the leaderboard. The leaderboard was basically where they could see where they were compared to their peers. And it gave them that piece of motivation. And in the focus group they talked about they'd look and they see "oh I'm going to pass her today." So they go home and they do some quests and they come back and say "I passed you." So it gave them that kind of extrinsic view for some of them. Now some of them didn't like that. They talked about how they're not really competitive and really what they would be looking for as well the progress bar is on their quest where they would see where it gives them the option to either say started it, it's in progress or it's been completed. And so some of them responded more to the individual progress as opposed to the competitive "How am I doing against my peers." But either way there were some external motivators that stood out.

[00:26:56] This is Sonja Vegdahl, and I want to talk about choice because that's one of the features in gamification that the three of us were kind of drawn to and the students did appreciate having many choices. They liked being able to choose which topic they learned about. They liked being able to choose the order of completing the quests, they liked being able to choose if they did a 15 minute one or a 60 minute one based on their schedule. They liked deciding when they completed it and they liked to decide where to complete it, especially the ones that didn't have to come to class they could do it at home on their own time. And they also liked when the quest gave it a choice of reading or listening or watching, which kind of learning activity they would have. But our research also suggests that students had strong but different opinions about the number of choices. Some students wanted all the quests available so they could work through them quickly and were frustrated when the professor didn't release them all at the beginning or waited till they completed some until the others were available and others preferred having a few that were usually available to complete. So they didn't want to have a lot they just wanted a few because it was like a little bit too much to have so many.

[00:28:07] Yeah, a little information overload there.

[00:28:09] Right. Right. And students were also split on having deadlines. Some of them liked to have certain deadlines certain quests because it motivated them and they didn't leave them all to the end of the semester. They wanted deadlines along the way and then others liked the flexibility of being able to complete them any time during the semester and not having get them done by a certain time. So that was kind of split for the students. Then another thing that I want to talk about besides

students' opinion about having increased twice was they talked about wanting quests that were closely connected to the activities in the classroom and not as kind of an add on and separately on their own timeline, and an example would be in my class with the self care quests the students really did it on their own separately and it wasn't closely linked to activities that we did in the class. With the other two classes that my colleagues taught the content of the quests was closely connected to what was happening in the classroom. And students liked that structure where the quests were connected to what they were learning. So that was an interesting finding.

[00:29:14] Do you have any thoughts about why that may be?

[00:29:18] That's a good question. I think they just maybe thought it was too separate. And even though I gave comments on their self care quest. I think they know each other fairly well from their different classes and to be able to share a little bit about their experiences in class. Think it kind of multiplied the benefit if what they were doing in their quest also connected and was built on in the classroom. So those would be my thoughts.

[00:29:42] Yes, so you're saying is that they felt more concrete or applicable to what they were actually learning at that time?

[00:29:49] Yeah so it certainly made me think about moving forward. I want to make more connections between our quests and what happens in the classroom.

[00:29:57] And I think, and this is Christie Bernklau Halvor, I'd like to jump in if that's OK with also some conclusions we've reached about how it impacted our own teaching, which is obviously closely related to student engagement and learning. But we've done a lot of reflection on what it was like for us to teach using gamification and quest based platform. We came away with a very strong sense that it improved our teaching and for a few different reasons. One was it felt more intentional even than normal, I like to think that we're very intentional teachers and we do designer on ground classes very thoughtfully. But there was something about using this gamified platform where we had to plan out all the options and the different routes for the students and the ways that they were going to connect and the achievements and badges that were going to be linked to them and designing that whole roadmap before the class started just added an extra level of intentionality, in addition to just being part of a pilot program, that always helps too. And then also being introduced to some of the theory behind gamification and the emphasis on learning through trial and error and failure and being able to get feedback and then try again. So it's not just the turning in of work once, it's the turning in of work, getting feedback, and you just keep going as long as you're willing to put in the time you keep going till you get it. And that challenged us, it helped us rethink some of our own pedagogies, which was helpful. We felt like it helped us add in more choice, obviously we've talked about that a lot. But also more visual and hands on learning for the students. I think all three of us said that we felt like we had more videos and hands-on learning than we had in our other traditional on ground classes. The platform encouraged it and it also made it easier, it made it look better for students. I think it was more engaging for them and then it let us apply those neuroscience things that I spoke about a brief time ago. It let us give students more immediate feedback, that was actually something we heard strongly from the second focus group that they really liked the consistent communication and feedback loop. So instead of coming to class once a week, turning in an assignment and then hopefully getting back the next week with feedback they were turning in multiple shorter quests getting immediate feedback getting to try again, having questions asked of them and they felt like they were in greater communication with us than they were in the traditional format and we felt like that improved our teaching as well.

[00:32:15] Building upon that, do you have any advice for someone who might be interested in trying to add gamification elements to their courses?



[00:32:25] This is Sonja Vegdahl. Just as moving to an online learning environment or a hybrid learning, there are just so many options and ways to do it. So you really need to think about who your students are and what your goals are and then introduce to the different ways that you can, in this case designing quests. If you were using their Resly platform. So it seems like it just opens up a whole new world of options. So that's exciting but also can be a little intimidating. That's particularly advice but just knowing that it's kind of a journey and that there are a lot of things you can try and even though we were all doing it I think actually putting it into our class was done very independently because our goals and how we were thinking about it was different. We weren't really talking with each other much about how we were doing our quests because they were just so very different.

[00:33:17] And this is Christie, I would jump in with the encouragement to take it in chunks, which I did not do. We were advised to do a small portion of the class the first time around because you don't have to do the whole thing gamified. Students can benefit or explore what it's like in smaller chunks and because I was hybridising I just kind of jumped all in and it was a lot of work to do an entire class all at once. And Julie was designing a whole class. She also ended up doing that too I know. But if it's possible to engage gamification in small pieces I think it's a wise idea because of course there are a lot of lessons along the way.

[00:33:52] So maybe start with one or two smaller content areas and then expand from there instead of trying to tackle an entire course at one time?

[00:34:01] I think so. I mean Sonja did that right. She took the Self Care Strategies and she did that one part of the class and I think that that's a very realistic and perhaps smart self-friendly way to do it.

[00:34:11] Yeah I would think so.

[00:34:13] This is Julie Dodge. Can I just add, I think that what Christie's just pointing out is just to anticipate when you're implementing this, it's going to take more time upfront. And there will be mistakes, you'll find out there's a bug in the system, you set up a quest strong and the release date didn't happen when it was supposed to and so you just want to know that the first time you run through this it's going to take more time.

[00:34:32] I think it helped that we told the students that they were part of a pilot project and they were going to be working with us through it. And we recognized that there might be some challenges and we wanted their feedback. They seemed quite forgiving of those glitches. They would just e-mail us and say "oh it's locked" or "I can't get in" or "I can't use my password," whatever. And I feel like we have pretty decent support from Resly and then also from folks on campus because usually there are questions I couldn't help them with at all. But then I would send them on to someone else and we were able to respond but I felt like we're pretty patient.

[00:35:02] I agree.

[00:35:03] Going back to gamification in general, do you have any concerns or cautions he might have in using gamification in social work education?

[00:35:13] This is Christie, I can throw out a couple. And Julie sure can jump in. We do have some questions hanging out there so I had mentioned the grading before and that's one of them. If you're using a quest based gamified approach the belief is that you learn the competency or you don't. And so it was challenging for us to figure out how to apply quest based learning in a university setting.

We feel a responsibility to graduate schools, for example, to differentiate grading and differentiate between a student who has sufficient skill from a student who has exceptional skill. And so that grading piece is one kind of question or tention for us still. We also thought a lot about deadlines and that idea of having choice and having students self-pace. But then there were also times in a couple of our classes where we wanted all the students to be at a certain similar level of understanding or of skill because we wanted to work with them as a group to move onto the next step. And if students had a lot of freedom in terms of when they didn't didn't do the work they wouldn't come to class in a similar enough place and it made it more difficult to move on together. Deadlines, kind of that balance between choice and freedom and then some group accountability. Even students who just tend to procrastinate or have a lot of outside responsibilities, they're not going to, you know, give up time with their kid even if the material is really interesting. If there's not a deadline attached to it they're not going to give up time with their kid to do it most of the time and so, there's some tension around that too and then also the idea of short and long quests. We were encouraged to make our quests as short as possible, 10 to 30 minutes of work. You know, chunk it out because then students are more likely to jump in. They feel like they can get something done and then get back to whatever else they have to do in their life. And I think we all agree with that idea. There's a lot of ways in which that's beneficial to students and they certainly told us they liked it but then we also have these questions in the back of our mind about the field and long term assessments. You know when you're doing a home study you don't get to do that in 15, 30 minute chunks. And so wanting some more holistic realistic work balanced with those short quests, those are a few things that come to mind.

[00:37:16] This is Julie Dodge. Well I'll just bounce off of what you were saying about the short and the long. I think you know, the Resly research, the Resly was originally used in high school and elementary ed. So yeah, short quests work better for them. But I think at the college level it's OK to push the envelope a bit. I would expect university level students to be able to take on bigger tasks and to be able to do that independently. So I think for me I had it a couple of quests that yeah it took an hour and a half to two hours. But that's what it took to get it done and to really complete the learning and if I had broken those up into smaller quests it wouldn't have worked. They wouldn't have gotten the product and I'm thinking specifically of at a higher level for my course where I had them specializing in a specific area and they would do a little research and create fact sheets, I've gotten really positive feedback on those fact sheets because they feel like "Now I have a tool that I can take with me into the field" and if they hadn't had that longer quest they wouldn't have that.

[00:38:12] OK.

[00:38:12] So I think it's OK to push the envelope.

[00:38:15] And Julie, one of the things that you might want to talk about like who gamification appeals to because I think you've spoken the most in our group meetings about that. We were a little surprised by who seemed to like it and who didn't.

[00:38:28] Yeah. Our assumptions going into this were that our traditional students will be more open to gamification that are non-traditional. Because, you know, they're younger, they've grown up in a technology world more and you know we did get feedback in the focus groups and in our course assessment that at first, people, especially our nontraditional were a little apprehensive about the games and they were a little fearful of the technology or they gamification idea. Because they're not games. And many of them came back and said "I really liked it. It was more conducive with my learning style, it was more reflective of how I do things and I had the choice that fit into my schedule and my lifestyle." So we had, you know, some of our nontraditional students that were more responsive. And then we had a couple of traditional students who were like "I hate this. Give me a book." And that just kind of flipped our idea of who was going to respond well and really I

think it comes down to individual learning styles. The gamification platform works well for certain people's learning styles and gave more and it seemed to be more responsive to a wider variety of learning styles. Although there were still some that were like "No. I mean I can do because I have to. But it's not my preferred method." Overall response was really positive. But yeah in each semester I think we had a couple of students they would just rather not do it this way.

[00:39:44] Right. So at least giving them the options gave them greater choice which they seemed to like.

[00:39:49] Indeed, indeed. And those who were fearful that we thought would struggle wound up doing even better. Most of them were were really open to the idea because it was different it just wasn't like every other class.

[00:40:02] Some of the research on gamification also talks about how it works best when you give students a choice of using gamification or not. But that would be deciding the class in kind of two ways. So we forced all of our students to use it. But for those students who didn't like it it would have been very nice for them to say "here, read this textbook" or "come to this lecture where you're the only one there because everyone else wants to see it online." Yeah I forgot about that research. The other question that specifically for me is the accountability piece that when students were doing their self care quests I didn't give them quizzes on the content but I talked about how it was going to be useful for them. And then when they did their self care practices and kept a journal about what they did and what the impact was and what their thoughts were about that that in the focus group some have talked about that being manufactured, that they just kind of put stuff down. And so as I move forward and if other people were thinking about doing something like this I want to think about ways to make them more accountable so that they can't just say "Oh I, you know, I ran two miles today, I ran one point five miles today and I felt great, I was tired or whatever." Of course they can manufacture that. So tying that to their ethical responsibilities and then maybe thinking of ways to build in more accountability. Because our students have so many things on their plate. And that's a big temptation.

[00:41:23] The last question, what's next for you as a social work program?

[00:41:27] This is Christy Bernkalu Halvor. Well first we're really glad that we tried this and that we've learned so much about our teaching and also about our students. So we plan to continue using gamification and making some adaptations based on the research in all of our three classes. And we're not quite sure how many more semesters we'll be doing this, that's really more of a university decision because the platform is costly but certainly we'll be using it at least the next semester. Probably the next two semesters. We also plan to explore other ways to integrate technology in our classrooms in a way that fits our mission of educating diverse students and then plan to continue to collect data on our students' experiences with gamification and perhaps write an article for publication.

[00:42:10] Anything else you guys would like to say before we end?

[00:42:16] I just say it's just a privilege to be able to share this information and we thank you for the opportunity.

[00:42:20] Thank you all very much. This was a very interesting conversation about gamification and you gave us a lot to think about. Thank you.

[00:42:29] You have been listening to Dr. Julie Dodge, Dr. Christie Bernklau Halvor, and Dr. Sonja Vegdahl sharing their experiences with incorporating gamification into their social work courses.

Our hope is that you have found their discussion instructive. Please join us next time at [inSocialWork](#).

[00:42:59] Hi I'm Nancy Smyth, Professor and Dean of the University at Buffalo School of Social Work. Thanks for listening to our podcast. We look forward to your continued support of the series. For more information about who we are as a school, our history, our online and on the ground degree and continuing education programs, we invite you to visit our website at [www.socialwork.buffalo.edu](http://www.socialwork.buffalo.edu). And while you're there check out our Technology and Social Work Resource Center. You'll find it under the Community Resources menu.