



CLARINETS AND DRAGONS

A PEDAGOGY OF GAMIFICATION FOR DISENGAGED STUDENTS

Jeffrey Kitson and Kristin Steelman, Presenters
ClarinetFest 2025



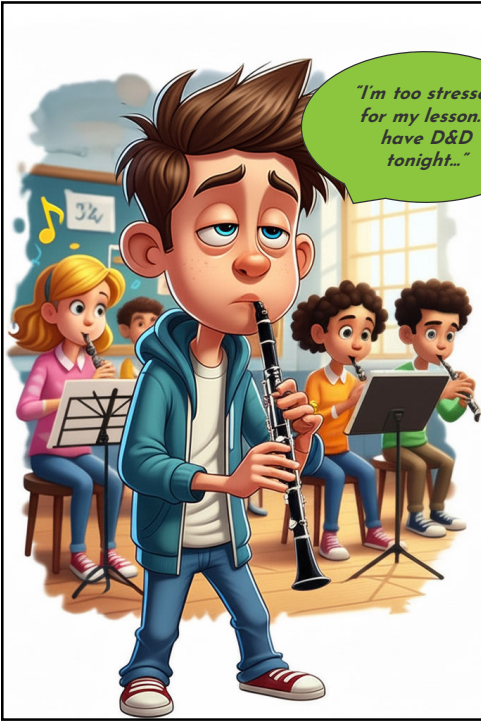
MEET JAYDEN





MEET JAYDEN






THE INSPIRATION

- The Issue:
 - Lessons felt like a slog
 - Band participation, breathing issues, and more...
 - Student only talked about D&D
- Lesson Challenges:
 - Not knowing individual circumstances
 - Limited IEP/504 Plan access (because FERPA)

Student loved D&D (and not the clarinet)



“WELL, JUST PLAY CLARINETS AND DRAGONS
WITH HIM THEN...”



MEET THE PRESENTERS

Jeff Kitson

- Central Community College (Columbus, NE)
- disabilities in the choral classroom



Kristin Steelman

- Private clarinet teacher for 20+ years
- Northview Public Schools (Grand Rapids, MI)



We met at Michigan State in 2001. Go Green!



THE RESEARCH



Gaming and Mental Health

- **Feeling out of control → Seeking something to control**
- **Gaming gives struggling players:**
 - Sense of accomplishment / positive feedback
 - Greater purpose
 - Despite rewards not being tangible / "real"



THE RESEARCH



Citation


- Di Blasi, M., et al. (2019). "Problematic video game use as an emotional coping strategy." J Behav Addict.
- HG Team. (2020). "Video Games and Mental Health Explained." Healthy Gamer.
- Stuart, K. (2015). "Video games aren't about power - they're about agency." The Guardian.
- Wysocki, Matthew. 2013. Ctrl-Alt-Play : Essays on Control in Video Gaming. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co.




MOTIVATION

		PERCEIVED CONTROL →	
		LOW	HIGH
CONFIDENCE ↑	HIGH	Blame equipment "It's my reed..."	Effort and persistence The student we all want
	LOW	Apathy Quits / Does Nothing	Excuses or negative comparison "I'm not good at this because...<excuse>"

Adapted from Schunk, Dale H., Paul R. Pintrich, and Judith L. Meece. 2007. *Motivation in Education: Theory, Research, and Applications* Prentice Hall. used in *Ctrl-Alt-Play* (pg. 29)




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How do we get them here?!

CONTROL - THE ULTIMATE MECHANIC



Students want to be successful and have their efforts affect the outcome

- **Press a button:**
 - In a game → affects the outcome, positive feedback
 - In life → unpredictable, out of control
- **Games offer:**
 - Sense of control (even random - i.e. dice)
 - Connection to a greater purpose (heroic adventure)
 - Rewarding feedback



CONTROL - THE ULTIMATE MECHANIC



For students who feel a bit out of control in their own lives...

- **Gamification lets them:**
 - Become a hero
 - Fight the forces of discord with their clarinet
 - Feel an immediate sense of being in charge of their own story



BASIC GAMEPLAY



- Create an enemy
- Student plays their instrument then rolls
- Rolls are deducted from enemy health (called "hit points" or "HP")
- Teacher can adjust rolls based on playing
- Got the enemy to zero? You win!



THAT'S IT?!



WELL...



ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Gemini

"I am a college music teacher and I am helping a friend create a game called 'Clarinets and Dragons,' to help her student learn. Her student loves Dungeons and Dragons, but struggles to play the clarinet. Please write short D&D style adventure for her student to play."



THE QUEST



SIR CLARINETTO THE BOLD

The Quest for the Missing Melody (A Clarinet-Themed D&D Adventure)

Characters:

- Sir Clarinetto the Bold (Your friend's student, the Clarinet Player)
- Professor Forte (A Wise Old Music Master)

Setting:

The bustling town of Sharpsburg, renowned for its music school, the Lyrebird Academy.

Story:

Sir Clarinetto the Bold, a promising young adventurer, is enjoying a well-deserved rest at the Prancing Pony tavern after a recent goblin raid. Suddenly, a frantic Professor Forte, his clarinet teacher from Lyrebird Academy, bursts through the door.



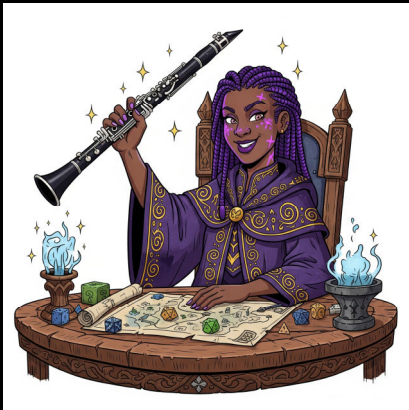
WORLDBUILDING



- **Ten sample adventures are available**
 - Change, remix, or riff on them
 - Make up your own
 - Use A.I. (really, it's okay!)
- **Student can create their own character(s) / adventure(s)**
- **Easy, no previous knowledge required**



MECHANICS



- You are the dungeon master!
- Make it up as you go
- Student progresses through trials to complete an adventure
- The Three Trials:
 - Long Tones
 - Scales
 - Repertoire



GAME PROGRESS TRACKER

Roll!

Trials Progress (30/30)

Player Health (30/30)

Adventure Progress (5/3)

MUSIC

Major

Natural Minor

Harmonic Minor

Melodic Minor

Bb Major (Ab Concert)

Random Long Tone

Random Scale

No saved game link yet.

Save Game

ABOUT

Created by Jeffrey Kitson and Kristin Steelman

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Please visit the [project page](#) for more information.

PLAY

<https://jeffkitson-music.github.io/cnd>



DM-ING FOR NOOBS



- **Improvise!**
- **Student should feel their actions (playing/rolling) affect the outcome**
- **Mini victories = sense of accomplishment**
- **Theme to student interest!**



Drew Carey, *Whose Line Is It Anyway?*







LEEROY JENKINS!



LOOT



- In-game bonus or just for fun
- IRL: sticker, etc.
- In-Game: Bonus roll, clarinet special powers
- Totally Optional - you don't owe them something



RESULTS



- Nothing worked....until CnD
- Band Director Feedback
- It's not about the dragons
 - Meet students where they are
 - Don't be afraid to transcend traditions and try a new adventure



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RESOURCES



Game Tracker

<https://jeffkitson-music.github.io/cnd>

Resource Website:

<https://github.com/jeffkitson-music/clarinets-and-dragons>



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Take a picture of this slide!



QUESTIONS?


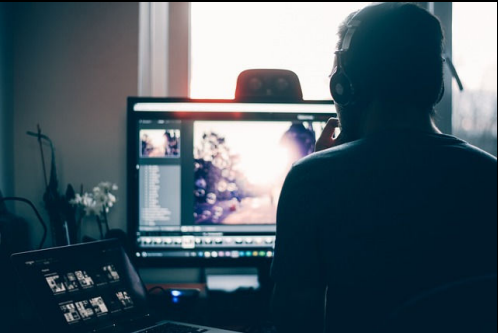




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