Role Playing and Perspective Taking: An Educational Point of View

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ABSTRACT

The rationale of this work combines the concepts of role playing and storytelling in the creation of an interactive virtual environment aimed at assessing and training students’ perspective taking skill, or the ability of students in primary and secondary level to take the point of view of the characters of a narrative. The ability to take the perspective of others is extremely important from the cognitive point of view. Piaget has suggested that the moment we abandon the egocentric perspective in favor of the ability to take another point of view, takes place not earlier than seven years of age. Subsequent researches challenged the findings of Piaget. For this reason, the project will address children in the last years of primary school (aged 8-10) and the first level of secondary school (aged 11-13). From 8 years old then, in fact, the child, in the opinion of many researchers who have addressed this issue, should be out of the egocentric stage and should have acquired the skill of perspective taking. The goal of current stage is to create a tool that allows the students to take the point of view of the characters in a story and to make choices in the narrative, which are consistent with the role of the character played.

Keywords: Digital Storytelling, Morphology of Tales, Perspective Taking, Role Playing

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1. INTRODUCTION

The rationale of this work combines the concepts of role playing and storytelling in the creation of an interactive virtual environment aimed at assessing and training students’ perspective taking skill, or the ability of students in primary and secondary level to take the point of view of the characters of a narrative.

The role playing, from a teaching perspective, is an exercise designed to give to participants the chance to play the role of “actors”, providing them the opportunity to examine their own behavior, to experiment with new attitudes, and especially, to emphasize different points of view in order to receive positive feedback.

Castagna has defined the role playing as an act performed by one or more participants in a seminar, in front of colleagues in the same seminar, which will then be invited to comment on and, in some cases, to repeat it (Castagna, 2001).

In the definition of Van Ments, the role playing experience essentially consists of “a make-believe representation of some real-life event, carried out in order to help participants [who play a role] get better at managing the event itself” (Ments, 1983).

In an educational context, the result is a heightened awareness, on the part of students, of their own attitudes, thanks to the occasion to meditate and observe the behavior of others through the analysis of the entire process.

Furthermore, the enactive component of role playing makes it an effective teaching strategy: “The role playing, in an educational context, combines memory with mechanisms of creativity and identification, activating affective and motor memory” (Capranico, 1997).

For these reasons, role playing is considered an effective method of teaching animation. In the words of Bonaiuti, Calvani and Ranieri, role playing is a “strategy based on the reconstruction of a real situation (dramatization) in which students are asked to interpret social or representative roles to develop relational skills or decision-making skills” (Bonaiuti, Calvani, & Ranieri, 2007).

2. ROLES AND FUNCTIONS

As this work is based on the role as a key component of the role playing and storytelling, we believe it is appropriate to start with a precise definition of “role”.

According to Hayes-Roth, a role is a class of individuals whose behaviors, relationships and interactions prototypes are known to the actors and the audience (Hayes-Roth, Van Gent, & Huber, 1997).

In order to develop this meaning of role in interactive virtual environment, we have also based on the seminal work of Vladimir Propp’s morphology of the fairy tale, published in Russian in 1928, but largely unknown in the West until its first translation in 1958 (Propp, 2010).

In the present work, Propp’s typology is useful “because the narrative progression depends on function rather than content. The functions are arranged in a consistent sequential order but the content within the functions can change. It thus allows us to swap content without derailing the narrative of the story” (Aylett, Lim, Louchart, Petta, & Riedl, 2010; Gibson, 2010).
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