

Chapter 10

Affordances and Constraints of Analog Games for Ethics Education: Dilemmas and Dragons

Spencer P. Greenhalgh
Michigan State University, USA

ABSTRACT

Today's students face a wide range of complex moral dilemmas, and games have the potential to represent these dilemmas, thereby supporting formal ethics education. The potential of digital games to contribute in this way is being increasingly recognized, but the author argues that those interested in the convergence of games, ethics, and education should more fully consider analog games (i.e., games without a digital component). This argument draws from a qualitative study that focused on the use of an analog roleplaying game in an undergraduate activity that explored ethical issues related to politics, society, and culture. The results of this study are examined through an educational technology lens, which suggests that games (like other educational resources) afford and constrain learning and teaching in certain ways. These results demonstrate that this game afforded and constrained ethics education in both ways similar to digital games and ways unique to analog games.

INTRODUCTION

Whether they are children, teenagers, or adults, today's students live in a world facing innumerable and seemingly insurmountable challenges. For example, contemporary environmental issues such as climate change are defined both by stakeholders' sharp disagreements over the proper response and by the disadvantage that any proposed response will inevitably impose on at least some of those stakeholders (Ferkany & Whyte, 2011). Likewise, the decades since the Second World War have seen not only continued war but also a widening gap between the world's rich and poor (McWilliams & Piotrowski, 2009). Furthermore, these challenges are not limited to issues of worldwide consequence: Sandel (2009) suggests that students and citizens should be asking questions about how much CEOs should earn, whether psychological injuries merit military decorations, and where the limits of supply and demand are found.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-0261-6.ch010

Formal education has a role to play in preparing students to deal with these challenges. Roseth (2016) asserts that *morality*—the distinction between right and wrong—and *ethics*—socially-constructed standards for making that distinction—are generally recognized as an essential part of what students need to learn as part of their schooling. However, teaching ethics goes beyond addressing right and wrong to supporting students as they experience new moral perspectives. Gibbs (2014) argues that “[i]maginatively putting oneself in the place of another, or social perspective-taking, is central to moral development and behavior” (p. 1), and these temporary shifts are accompanied by the more permanent changes in perspective that can result from genuine moral reflection and argument (Sandel, 2009). Ferkany and Whyte (2011) suggest that some sort of formal education is necessary to help students develop the traits needed for effective perspective-taking and ethical deliberation. That is not to say that *ethics education* is restricted to philosophy classes; in the case of climate change, it is not inconceivable that classes as diverse as biology, history, and composition would all ask students to distinguish right from wrong within and adopt new perspectives on this topic, thereby incorporating ethics into their curriculum.

Over the past few decades, games and games scholarship have shown increasing awareness of ethics and morality. For example, games scholars have directed their attention to popular titles that explicitly address issues of moral or philosophical importance (Poels & Malliet, 2011a), impose ethical standards on their players (Bogost, 2007), or otherwise offer players a space for moral deliberation (Jansz, 2011). In response to the increasingly ethical nature of these games, Sicart (2009) has argued for the treatment of computer game players as moral agents, a position that other games researchers have since adopted (Poels & Malliet, 2011a). Scholars are also increasingly arguing that all video games represent ethical values in some form or another (Bogost, 2007; Flanagan & Nissenbaum, 2014; Sicart, 2009). Just as any curriculum that touches on distinguishing right from wrong and changing moral perspectives can be said to fall under the category of ethics education, any game that invites its players to make ethical decisions and adopt new perspectives becomes a potential tool for these ethics educators.

The purpose of this chapter is to use one classroom experience to highlight the particular potential of an often-overlooked category of games in ethics education. Although much attention has been paid to the ethical relevance of digital games—consider titles such as *The Ethics of Computer Games* (Sicart, 2009), *Moral Issues in Digital Game Play* (Poels & Malliet, 2011b), and *Values at Play in Digital Games* (Flanagan & Nissenbaum, 2014)—little games scholarship acknowledges the ethical potential of analog, or nondigital, games. In the fields of education and libraries, some have called for continued—and expanded—attention to analog games despite the overwhelming popularity of digital games (Levine, 2008; Mayer & Harris, 2010). In a similar vein, I use this chapter to report on the use of an analog roleplaying game to help students adopt new perspectives and think about questions of right and wrong, thereby inviting games scholars and ethics educators to look beyond digital games. In advocating a shift of the conversation on games and ethics, I set out in particular to demonstrate the affordances that analog games share with digital games, to explain what affordances analog games can offer that digital games cannot, and to acknowledge constraints associated with analog games.

BACKGROUND

The interview data presented in this chapter builds on and responds to an existing body of research on games and formal education. Although I focus particularly on the use of games in teaching and learning ethics, this chapter draws on—and may have implications for—teaching and learning in all formal con-

17 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

www.igi-global.com/chapter/affordances-and-constraints-of-analog-games-for-ethics-education/157623

Related Content

Establishing a Science of Game Based Learning

Alicia Sanchez, Janis Cannon-Bowers and Clint Bowers (2010). *Serious Game Design and Development: Technologies for Training and Learning* (pp. 290-304).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/establishing-science-game-based-learning/41079

Games Development for Pedagogical and Educational Purposes

Vitor Carvalho, Celina Pinto Leão, Filomena Soares and Maria Manuela Cruz-Cunha (2011). *Computer Games as Educational and Management Tools: Uses and Approaches* (pp. 1-9).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/games-development-pedagogical-educational-purposes/53947

Anonymity in the Age of Digital Art: Feminist Approaches in Vietnam's Information Age

Alex Gaja Ortega and Ha Huong Thao (2025). *Innovations and Challenges in Computing, Games, and Data Science* (pp. 77-100).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/anonymity-in-the-age-of-digital-art/380928

How Digital Gaming Enhances Non-Formal and Informal Learning

Daniel Aranda and Jordi Sánchez-Navarro (2011). *Handbook of Research on Improving Learning and Motivation through Educational Games: Multidisciplinary Approaches* (pp. 395-412).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/digital-gaming-enhances-non-formal/52505

A Next Gen Interface for Embodied Learning: SMALLab and the Geological Layer Cake

David Birchfield and Mina Johnson-Glenberg (2010). *International Journal of Gaming and Computer-Mediated Simulations* (pp. 49-58).

www.irma-international.org/article/next-gen-interface-embodied-learning/40939