

Chapter 3

Videogames and Moral Pedagogy: A Neo-Kohlbergian Approach

Dan Staines

The University of New South Wales, Australia

ABSTRACT

The Four Component Model of Moral Functioning is a framework for understanding moral competence originally developed by James Rest and subsequently revised with Darcia Narvaez. It posits that moral competence can be broken up into four distinct components: moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral motivation, and moral action. The purpose of the present chapter is to demonstrate, via an examination of three commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) videogames (Ultima IV, Fallout 3, and Mass Effect), how this model can function as a blueprint for the design of moral content in games intended for pedagogy and entertainment.

MORAL PSYCHOLOGY: KOHLBERGIAN AND NEO- KOHLBERGIAN APPROACHES

Research into the psychology of moral development has experienced something of a renaissance over the last two decades. Where the field was once defined by the views of Lawrence Kohlberg and the cognitive-developmental paradigm, new perspectives informed by recent research in the cognitive sciences now predominate. Chief among

these is the so-called “Neo-Kohlbergian” program championed by psychologist James Rest and colleagues (1999).

To understand the neo-Kohlbergian approach to moral psychology, it is first necessary to appreciate the work of Kohlberg himself and the cognitive-developmental tradition in general. Developed by Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget in the first half of the 20th Century, the cognitive-developmental approach to moral psychology is rooted in two key claims: 1) that moral competence “stems from structures of moral reasoning” (Krebs and Denton, 2005, p.631) and 2) that these structures develop over time in

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-61520-845-6.ch003

a sequence of stages or phases, with each stage representing a “better cognitive organization than the one before it” (Kohlberg, 1981, p.26).

In ‘The Moral Development of the Child’ (1932), Piaget argued that moral stage development is characterized by two distinct developmental phases: Heteronymous and Autonomous. During the Heteronymous stage, which starts in infancy and ends in the early teens, children think of morality in terms of obedience, and the validity of moral rules as a function of authority. But as children grow older and interact regularly with peer groups, they develop an appreciation for the motives behind moral behavior, for the utility of reciprocity, and for the status of morals as entities separate from the authorities that enforce them (Krebs & Denton, 2005, p.629).

In his 1958 doctoral dissertation, Kohlberg—seeking to expand upon Piaget’s work—developed a series of nine hypothetical moral dilemmas and read them to a sample of 81 boys, recording their responses and probing extensively to determine the rationale for their judgments (Krebs & Denton, 2005, p.629). Over the next twenty years, Kohlberg followed up with more than half of his original respondents, re-interviewing them and refining

his moral dilemmas as well as the methodology used to obtain response data. On the basis of these longitudinal studies, Kohlberg developed a six-stage model of moral judgment maturity (see Table 2) representing an “invariant sequence” of moral development (Kohlberg, 1987, p.20). Each moral stage entails “a new logical structure” – an organized way of thinking.

Kohlberg insists that cognitive development must always precede its moral counterpart (ibid. p.138), although he does allow that in many cases a person’s cognitive maturity can outstrip their moral competence. Although moral stage development is universal to humans, most of us (as the cynical reader might expect) do not make the most of our potential in this regard, with the majority of adults tested by Kohlberg and colleagues classified as “conventional” – i.e., in Stage 3 or 4.

Insofar as it places deliberative reason at the core of moral cognition, Kohlberg’s approach to moral psychology is typically classified as rationalist or Kantian (Hauser, 2006, p.16). On this view, the most reliable measure of a person’s moral competence is the sophistication of their moral reasoning. This emphasis, or perhaps over-emphasis, on rationality constitutes the main

Table 1. Kohlberg’s six stages of moral development (Source: Kohlberg, 1981, pp.17-19)

Level One: Preconventional Morality	Stage 1: Punishment and Obedience: the physical consequences of action determine its goodness or badness regardless of the human meaning or value of these consequences.
	Stage 2: Instrumental Relativism: right actions consist of that which instrumentally satisfies one’s needs and occasionally the needs of others.
Level Two: Conventional Morality	Stage 3: Interpersonal Concordance: good behavior is that which pleases or helps others and is approved by them.
	Stage 4: Law and Order: right behavior consists of doing one’s duty, showing respect for authority, and maintaining the given social order for its own sake.
Level Three: Postconventional Morality	Stage 5: Social Contract: right action tends to be defined in terms of general individual rights and in terms of standards that have been critically examined and agreed on by the whole society.
	Stage 6: Universal Ethics: right is defined by the decision of conscience in accord with self-chosen ethical principles appealing to logical comprehensiveness, universality, and consistency.

15 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/videogames-moral-pedagogy/41310

Related Content

A First Step towards Integrating Educational Theory and Game Design

Jan-Paul van Staalduinen (2011). *Handbook of Research on Improving Learning and Motivation through Educational Games: Multidisciplinary Approaches* (pp. 98-117).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/first-step-towards-integrating-educational/52491

Applied Alternative Tools and Methods in the Replacement of the Game Design Document

Pedro Henrique Roscoe Lage de Oliveira, Carlos Alberto Silva de Miranda and Joao Victor Boechat Gomide (2023). *Research Anthology on Game Design, Development, Usage, and Social Impact* (pp. 585-598).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/applied-alternative-tools-and-methods-in-the-replacement-of-the-game-design-document/315506

Using Serious Games for Collecting and Modeling Human Procurement Decisions in a Supply Chain Context

Souleiman Naciri, Min-Jung Yoo and Rémy Glardon (2012). *Handbook of Research on Serious Games as Educational, Business and Research Tools* (pp. 135-156).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/using-serious-games-collecting-modeling/64252

Acceptability of Video Games Technology for Medical Emergency Training

James F. Knight (2013). *International Journal of Gaming and Computer-Mediated Simulations* (pp. 86-99).

www.irma-international.org/article/acceptability-of-video-games-technology-for-medical-emergency-training/102617

If the Gear Fits, Spin It Again!: Embodied Education, Design Components, and In-Play Assessments

Mina C. Johnson, David Birchfield and Colleen Megowan-Romanowicz (2019). *Exploring the Cognitive, Social, Cultural, and Psychological Aspects of Gaming and Simulations* (pp. 141-170).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/if-the-gear-fits-spin-it-again/218799