Chapter 12
Research Outline

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes how the research was developed: the hypotheses and the decisions taken in the planning stage are explained and the documentation on the carrying out of the project provided along with the research protocols.

INTRODUCTION

Interest in the role of simulation games in the learning/teaching process represents a research area which the promoters of the *Simulandia* project presented herein first began to reflect on at the beginning of the new millennium.

The aim of the early research efforts conducted in those years was to consider the theoretical basis of simulation games in education, from the perspective of recent findings into the learning and teaching process, and the ongoing research on knowledge acquisition and the different ways of learning that have emerged with the growth of the *knowledge society.*

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In other words, with reference to the educational needs of contemporary society, we put together recent research on learning and its emotive-motivational aspects with the characteristics of simulation games in a learning environment in order to identify their potential uses in guided educational contexts.

The operation of systematizing the theoretical and practical work (an investigation carried out in the Province of Cosenza on a sample of secondary school students who took part in the IG students programme)[1] allowed us to assess how the simulation game was perceived, experienced and appreciated by the student as a useful strategy for knowledge acquisition, thanks to the fact that it offers the chance for active participation in the learning process and group work in a context which was unusual if compared to normal teaching methods; these aspects, indeed, favour the growth of motivation, by facilitating self-awareness and helping the students to acquire knowledge skills (Piu A., 2002).

Subsequently, a practical research project carried out into the teaching experiences of primary and junior secondary school teachers at the Istituto Comprensivo "Don Milani" in Crotone, Calabria provided researchers with the opportunity to reflect on the employment of new learner-centred teaching strategies and different kinds of interaction both between teacher and learner and between learner and subject. The reflection triggered learning processes within the research group itself: the subjects were involved in a simulation game that provided the opportunity to experiment in a supportive environment where they could test themselves in the logics of communication and their own relationships with organisationally complex environments and, at the same time, experience both outdoor and indoor adult courses for designers and teachers of training courses[2] (Fregola, 2004; Piu A., 2006).

The considerations made by the research group at the end of the training course have enabled us to analyse a number of characteristics of simulation games from the inside and draw up various options on how the game could be used in schools. The theoretical background has been steadily widened and a decision taken to re-interpret simulation games from the perspective of the ecology of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986), in which games are configured as an expansion of the phenomenological world of the subject and appear to be functional part of the process of learning/teaching that goes to determine the learning conditions (Gagné R., 1973).

After the initial work of bringing together the theory with the results obtained, the members of the research group, on a wave of enthusiasm, felt the need to further their investigations and field work to be in a position to carry out data recognition.

in order to examine the advantages and pedagogical value of simulation as an intervention strategy. The work presented in this book illustrates the direction taken by the group as regards in which ambits simulation games were assumed to be most relevant and fruitful. This is the result mainly of classroom observations

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