

Chapter 5.13

Using Digital Games to Develop Ethical Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Teacher education that emphasizes the understanding and assessment of ethics can support the creation of an ethically aware and critically engaged citizenship. But how do we develop teachers who are reflective and critical thinkers of ethics? One potential solution is to incorporate digital games and simulations into teacher education curricula. Game worlds might be suitable playgrounds for ethical thinking because they can encourage experimentation with alternative identities, possibilities, and perspectives, and can support a learning sciences framework where: 1) cognition is situated, 2) cognition is social, and 3) cognition is distributed. In fact, games themselves,

like all media, reflect designed values systems that should be considered and analyzed. Using case studies of current commercial and more explicitly educational digital games, we create a set of recommendations for creating future games and simulations that teach ethics to educators.

INTRODUCTION

- You catch the top performing student in class letting a classmate cheat off of her. Do you give both of them F for the test, or just the one doing the copying?
- Some classroom software is missing, and you have a hunch who did it, but no evidence. What do you do?

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- One diminutive child is accused of bullying another (bigger) classmate, but neither appears to be telling the whole truth about what happened. Do you punish the accused child? How do your biases affect your decision?
- You overhear a child's parent say a racial slur in front of their child, and then witness their child say it to another child's face in class the next week. What do you say to the child's parents?

Teachers are constantly traversing ethical territory. Highly effective teaching relies on the critical thinking, reflection, and negotiation of ethics (Fisher, 2001). Argue Zubay and Soltis (2005), there is “an inherent moral and ethical relationship between those who teach and those who are taught... education itself is a moral endeavor... school is an environment of moral interaction and sometimes moral struggle” (p. 3-4). Teachers who are critical thinkers, analyzers, empathizers, and decision makers of values, can foster ethical classrooms and a learning environment that supports their students' ethical development—required for an engaged, citizenship within a diverse democracy.

Sicart defines ethics using Aristotle, as a “practice of virtues oriented towards achievement of a better life... to use judgement to evaluate the situations in which they were immersed, and thus take choices according to the will of being a good human being” (Sicart, 2005, p. 15). For teachers, we would expand this to include the practice of making choices based on standards of action that maximize teaching and learning and result in a supportive classroom environment that reflects tolerance for diverse opinion, respects individuals, and fosters expectations of success in achievement. Yet many educators have little practice handling ethical dilemmas, reflecting on one's value system, or considering alternate moral structures. Teachers regularly make ethical decisions without necessarily realizing their full implications, though their actions have consequences on the dynamics of

the classroom and on individual student behavior (Zubay and Soltis, 2005). Possibly more challenging than *knowing* what to do about ethical issues is *teaching* others how to handle them, despite that ethical norms themselves are “constitutive of teaching” (Churchill, 1982, pp. 297-298) and of any social relationship. Since ethical thinking processes and solutions to ethical problems are not clear cut, nor are they entirely replicable, the understanding, analysis and representation of these issues requires a complex learning environment that enables people, for example, to experiment and test different scenarios, creatively explore the consequences of possible actions, and to determine the tacit values inherent in the environment's social relationships.

In this chapter we argue that games and simulations, if properly designed, could be compelling ways to help teachers manage ethical issues and practice ethical thinking. We define simulations using Guetzkow (1963), as cited in Ellington, Gordon, and Fowlie (1998), “an operating representation of central features of reality” (p. 1), meaning that it can represent some aspect of reality and must be “ongoing and dynamic” (Ellington, Gordon, & Fowlie, 1998, p. 1). On the other hand, we define games using Jesper Juul (2004), as cited by Sicart (2005), who argues that “a game is a rule-based system with a variable and quantifiable outcome, where different outcomes are assigned different values, the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome, the player feels attached to the outcome, and the consequences of the activity are optional and negotiable” (p. 14). We argue that the games described in this chapter could be categorized more broadly as simulations, and could even be deemed as game-simulations, since they represent aspects of reality and are ongoing, but also include rule sets and variable outcomes that are influenced by the player (a discussion of game-simulation hybrids is offered by Ellington, et al., 1998).

Digital games and simulations might be an effective way to simulate classroom dynamics

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