

Chapter 17

Social and Citizenship Competencies in a Multiuser Virtual Game

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ABSTRACT

Colombia is a country that is growing in technological and economical areas, but cultural diversity, armed conflict, and everyday violence are forces that lessen the progress. The Ministry of Education proposed in 2004 standards for citizenship competencies that intend to teach children and youths abilities to live peacefully and respect the others. These standards have encouraged multiple initiatives and innovation to achieve goal in social and citizenship competencies. A research group of Universidad de Caldas created and evaluated a serious virtual game to support this policy. The game is a multiuser virtual game called Civia that shows a metaphor of collective challenge. Peaceful interaction, participation and respect are values required for survival in the game. Players can take individual decisions that affect positively or negatively the collective status, but an overall positive balance is needed to maintain collective resources. It was expected that collective auto regulation led to the learning of patterns and competencies to live peacefully together. Currently, there is no consensus in the research community about what and how video games can take learning outcomes and behavioral effects. An evaluation of the game shows positive results; however, some concerns about the complexity of everyday life about social interaction and learning transferability arise. The authors discuss findings according to proposed theories and models about effects of video games in education and behavior.

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PROBLEM ANALYSIS

Context in Conflict

The *information age* has been leading to a historical transformation process. The *new* economy, centered in technological and corporate innovations, is modifying the social processes in cities. Cities that have gone into this order have been key spaces for economic progress but they have also been challenged to achieve social balance and cultural identity. Factors related with armed conflicts and economical inequality, particularly present in developing countries, reduce the likelihood of a smooth entry into the new economy order. This is the case of Colombia, a South American country marked by contradictions. Economic and technological development and cultural diversity contrast with scant improvements in social and conflict matters. According to the Colombian Department of Statistics, the country has 45.088.439 inhabitants (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística [DANE], 2009a) and a high poverty index (46%) (DANE, 2009b), yet media and information technology show high penetration rates. In 2008, 83.8% of households owned a cell phone, 88.5% of households owned a television, 46.4% of people used computers, 37.5% of people older than five years accessed the Internet, and 40.91% of children between five and eleven years old had played video games in the previous month when they were asked (DANE, 2009c; DANE, 2008). Although the literacy index (91.6%) and school attendance for the range of age between 5 and 24 (65.5%) (DANE, 2005) are high, the book reading mean in the last twelve months was only two. These facts put digital media as a source for social change strategies because its use is high and seems to be increasing.

Apart from this, the Colombian armed conflict has integrated and disintegrated broader civil population groups in the war front among the Colombian army, paramilitary groups, and insurgent guerrillas. Their fighting, which is part

of an irregular war, occurs mostly in national countryside territories like rural areas, indigenous reservations and natural parks. Although armed violence occurs mostly in the countryside, the consequences of a violent environment are also visible in cities. The phenomena of social displacement and non-military demobilization affect everyday life and the development process in the cities. Urban centers show everyday effects of new interactions with immigrants from the countryside, violent media exposure, and domestic violence conflicts. This has led the government and public and private institutions to carry out initiatives for strengthening peaceful social interaction among children, youths, and adults.

Social and Citizenship Competencies

Social competence is an educational concept derived from the challenges given by the interaction of individuals in communities. Semrud-Clikeman (2007) posited that “social competence is an ability to take another perspective concerning a situation and to learn from past experience and apply that learning to the ever-changing social landscape” (p. 1). She added that this ability is closely related with emotional competence and its lack can lead to aggressive behavior. In violent contexts, social competence becomes even more essential in social education and social change processes. The concept of social competence is also related to citizenship competencies, which mean both claiming human rights and fulfilling responsibilities. Antanas Mockus, a former Bogotá mayor, contended that someone is a citizen when we he or she respects minimal responsibilities, respects other rights, and engenders basic trust (Mockus, 2004). In Colombia these competencies have become the subject of national research and policies because violence has affected social interaction for more than five decades. Chaux (2009), for instance, surveyed previous research about the effects on children of the violent political conflict in Colombia and concluded that

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