

Chapter 14

Fostering Character Education with Games and Interactive Story Generation

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ABSTRACT

Promoting ethical, responsible, and caring behavior in young people is a perennial aim of education. Schools are invited to include moral teaching in every possible curriculum. Efforts have been made to find non-traditional ways of teaching such as games or role play or engaging students in moral dilemmas. However, classroom environments need to consider time constraints, curriculum standards, and differing children's personalities. Computer systems can offer rich environments that detect and respond to student knowledge gaps, misconceptions, and variable affective states. This chapter presents AEINS, an adaptive narrative-based educational game that helps the teaching of basic ethical virtues to young children to promote character education. The central goal is to engage students in a dynamic narrative environment and to involve them in different moral dilemmas (teaching moments) that use the Socratic method as the predominant pedagogy. The authors argue that AEINS incorporates appropriate game design principles and successfully manages the interaction between the narrative level and the tutoring level to maximize student learning. Moreover, it is able to convey the moral skills to its users, as shown in the evaluation.

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INTRODUCTION

“A moral is a message conveyed or a lesson to be learned from a story or event” (Dianne, 2001).

Mounting discipline problems, sometimes resulting in violence, shoplifting, drug abuse, and other criminal behaviors, raise the need to develop an awareness of social and moral responsibilities, a core component of character education. Character education implies the widely-shared, pivotally important, core ethical values, such as trustworthiness, caring, honesty, fairness, responsibility and respect for self and others along with supportive performance values that form the basis of good character, such as diligence, a strong work ethic, and perseverance (Lickona et al., 2007). Core ethical values are the basic principles that we consider when making decisions and judgments in our lives. Generally, character education aims to promote ethical, responsible, and caring young people. These values (virtues) are defined in terms of behaviors that can be observed in the life of the school.

One big challenge in character education is that *knowing* what is right does not guarantee *doing* what is right. As Watson (2003) illustrated: “getting high scores in an ethical course does not guarantee at all the actual behavior of that student.” And more importantly, he added that the core issue lies in not only knowing what is right and good but also in building a love for the good and the worthwhile. Accordingly, and based on Watson’s view, we should “identify what is good and what is bad behavior, instruct people as to what these are, and inspire people to behave in the right ways using examples for them to imitate.” We argue that the development of moral virtues requires extensive practice in the same way as other skills such as reading or writing. Children need to practice enough independent thinking and develop their moral reasoning by being in different situations and to act according to their

beliefs. By presenting the effects of their actions on themselves and others as consequences, they can, eventually, begin to formulate their own conceptions of rights, values and principles.

Schools are trying to include moral teaching in every possible facet of school, such as core subjects (academic curriculum), sports teams and clubs (extracurricular programs), and more implicitly in the teacher-student relationship (hidden curriculum) (Lickona et al., 2007). In the classroom environment, Halverson (2004) had found that traditional teaching using terms and abstractions may not be the best way to help children connect to images or situations in their embodied experiences in the world. Therefore, efforts to develop moral reasoning skills are made by targeting elementary and middle school students through classroom activities such as role playing, which helps students to transfer their knowledge and beliefs into actions (McBrien & Brandt, 1997), brainstorming moral dilemmas (Bolton, 1999) and using interactive learning models (Shapiro, 1999). Such efforts aim to help students’ cognitive development by allowing students to pursue moral actions and see how their decisions affect other people and themselves in relation to others. These trials have shown promising results demonstrating the effectiveness of learning by doing which helps students to draw analogies between what they experience in the classroom and that of real life, that is, to see the bigger picture. However, children differ in personalities and consequently in their strengths, weaknesses and needs, which raises the need for adaptive learning. Within the classroom environment this is very difficult to address because of time and curriculum constraints (Eriksson, 1997). Halverson (2004) challenged teachers to provide the kind of teaching that creates a safe place for their students, allows them to move outside of their comfort level and also challenges them to think outside of their current level of experience. While it is challenging to create such an environment in classrooms, computers can act as a solution.

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