

Ethical Behaviour, Personal Growth and Becoming a Citizen of the World: the power of online games

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Abstract

A research study was conducted on an Alternate Reality Game *Evoke* in spring 2010. The questions explored were around the participants narrative practices, and the potential for players and educators who use similar spaces to develop knowledge and application of critical literacy, as well as grow as individuals in their ethical sensibilities. This paper focuses on players' moral functioning in the gameworld, analyzed through a Four-component model, including moral judgment, moral sensitivity, moral motivation and moral action. Based on the model, four different themes emerged as a result of players' participation in the game. Those are: becoming a leader, being a good citizen, supporting and understanding others and expressing freedom of speech. All of those demonstrated that immersive gameworlds could provide space for rich, exhilarating, thought-provoking debate and knowledge building.

Keywords

Alternate Reality Games; ethics; personal growth; global citizen; leadership

Introduction

Games could be and are a powerful sandbox for simulating real life experiences (Gilbert, 2010). It may happen that the choices and decisions made in the game will never occur in the

player's real life, but the process of making them, has a high pedagogical value. The most emphasized benefit of having this playground, is the opportunity for players to reflect on their choices, outcomes and consequences (Koo & Seider, 2010; Nordlinger, 2010; Schrier, Diamond & Langendoen, 2010; Sicart, 2010). This critical reflection leads to moral reasoning (Vikaros & Degand, 2010).

Theoretical Background: ethics in gameworlds

In recent debates on the impact of video games, focus on the topic of ethics has increased. It is obvious that different authors look at different ethical dimensions inside and around gameworlds. Broadly, the debate may be divided into the following categories:

- 1) ethics of the medium;
- 2) ethics of the design;
- 3) ethics of the play and the players; and
- 4) issue of teaching ethics and ethical behaviour using games.

Ethics of the medium

The ethics of the medium is explored from the perspective of games as a cultural and social phenomenon, looking at their treatment in comparison with other media. Interesting questions arise around their status and legal inferences, including their positive and negative psychological and sociological impacts. Some theorists still wonder if games could and should be created around any topic regardless of its controversy, inherent perspectives, and sensitivity. Hoffman, for example, claims that "just because a game can be made doesn't mean it should" (2010, p. 115). Her concerns are similar to Frasca's (2004) comments on trivializing human life (e.g. when creating a game about Anna Frank). She worries that difficult issues which are hard to confront and view will be glamorized, thereby sending a completely opposite message from that which may have been intended. Brenda Brathwaite (2010), on the other hand, describes how in play with her daughter an unthreatening game environment presented exactly the right medium to learn about difficult moral dilemmas. Brathwaite received a standing ovation for her talk on Train, a game on the holocaust, at GDC 2010 (Game Developers Conference).

How are games treated in a legal system? Some theorists see games as one way of expressing the basic human right to freedom of speech (Reynolds, 2002). Reynolds claims the decision is about limiting “the right to hear rather than the right to speak” (2002, p. 7). That is, any content can exist but access to it will be restricted to different categories of audience.

Video games, like works of art, are protected by intellectual property law. Some of the designers’ work is easy to recognize as copyright protected material: computer code and audiovisual output, for example (Burk, 2005). It is not uncommon in MMORPGs, however, that a player will develop his/her character, achieve a higher level, and sell the character to another player. A question arises over character ownership: should it lie with the game designer who created the capacity for the character in the first place or with the player who works on his/her character, customizes it, and develops its attributes through his/her progress in the game? The creative contribution of the player is not generally recognized by US law, which presents legal and ethical challenges. However, owing to the increased number of multimedia products, pressure for recognizing multiple-platform properties to which intellectual property rights apply has mounted (C.R., 2009; Coleman & Dyer-Witthford, 2007).

Ethics of the design

The ethics of the design includes the presentation of content, representation of race, gender, and ethnicity, as well as rules and limitations that guide the play. The content in the game can be ethically questionable as well. Cultural and racial stereotyping is as equally present in video games as it is in other media (Al-Rawi, 2008; Dickerman, Christensen, & Kerl-McClain, 2008; Eastin, Appiah & Cicchirillo, 2009). In making choices about game characters’ looks and traits, game designers offer a certain view of racial, ethnic, or gender representation.

Most games have their rhetorical position established through their rules, leaving the players little scope for choice (Brathwaite and Sharp 2010; Sicart, 2005, 2010). Players make the decisions they are permitted to make. They have to play in a certain way. In accepting the game’s role, they accept a “certain way of being in the world” (Squire, 2006, p. 26).

How and to what extent videogames influence the player through their built-in ideologies and perspectives has not been fully explored. A teacher using games for education must carefully select the world views the games offer, or at least be aware of the experience students will have

playing particular games (Squire, 2006). Many commercial games display embedded ethics (Bogost, 2006; Sicart, 2005; Squire, 2006). Bogost believes there is still no single ideology for the medium, but he warns that strong political groups may pressure dissenting voices as in other media.

In talking about ethics and game design, Sicart claims,

Designing ethical gameplay challenges conventional wisdom, requires a reinterpretation of design as an aesthetic process, and more importantly, puts players as the centre of a moral universe created with the sole intention of challenging who they are, and who they want to be, as players, but also as moral beings. (2010, p. 13)

Ethics in play

Ethics in play is reflected through players' relationship to one another. Two important elements of that relationship are considered here: harassment and cheating.

Harassment is especially present among new players. These so-called *newbies* are easily recognized by experienced players. Newbies sometimes experience harassment, being followed and/or verbally abused by other players (Warner & Raiter, 2005). This verbal abuse can escalate into more severe types of violent or deviant game behaviour in which newbies are prevented from playing or "killed."

Cheating in video games is treated differently than cheating in other games. Cheating in cards or a board game is regarded as unacceptable and not fair play (Kimppa & Bisset, 2010). In video games, however, the playing community may help members cheat by providing codes or ways of manipulating the system. Players distance themselves from other players – rather than a direct action against another player, cheating is seen as reaching a personal goal or achieving satisfaction (Kimppa and Bissett, 2010). In some cases, finding ways to cheat is considered an achievement. In single-player games, extra *cheat* features are designed purposefully and serve as a marketing tool (Kimppa & Bisset, 2010). That players cannot see each other may have helped undercut conventional notions of cheating. Although they communicate and interact, they remain in their own virtual spaces.

Teaching ethics through games

Introducing moral education in computer games is not new (Sicart, 2010). Players, particularly MMORPG players who interact intensively, have the opportunity to learn about life choices, about others, and about themselves (Nordlinger, 2010). Squire believes that players of MMORPGs participate in social practices with real consequences for the gameworld, but wonders whether they are transferable to actual life.

Many other scholars theorize the concept of the *other* and our understanding of others, especially in terms of emotional expression (Gee, 2004, Simkins, 2010; Staines, 2010; Vikaros & Degand, 2010). One of the solutions to better understanding the perspectives of others is role-playing (Gilbert, 2010), which Phelps (2010) calls systemic thinking. Through interacting with others in gameworlds and understanding various viewpoints, we come to comprehend the values, morals and needs of others in the same way we do in actual life (Phelps, 2010).

Many disciplines employ role-play as an educational method, as in formal school, military, and counselling settings. Simkins (2010) claims that “the experience [of role playing] opens the door to an emphatic understanding of others” (p. 72). Because they are in role-play, gamers change players’ identities. In a social situation, inside a gameworld, our identity, as Vikaros and Degand (2010) point out, is based on comparison to others. Frequently, identity is based on players’ affiliation with different groups. The more open and transparent behaviour is to other players, the more they tend to behave ethically. They feel ethically obliged to fulfill their role in a group (Travis, 2010). On the other hand, Balzac writes, based on Zimbardo’s (2004) studies, “the more people perceive themselves to be anonymous, the more likely they are to engage in evil behaviour” (2010, p. 295).

Because it is a game, players can re-live the same experiences a number of times in the safety of a virtual environment (Swain, 2010). However, emotional and cognitive investment in a game can be so high that it influences the player’s behaviour outside the gameworld. When there is no personal stake in the outcome it is easier to make a choice, and learning usually does not happen (Balzac, 2010). Another important condition for connection is the creation of a social narrative and opportunities for interaction (Vikaros & Degand, 2010). Opportunities for cooperation enforce moral reasoning and reinforce positive behaviour (Koo & Seider, 2010; Phelps, 2010). Games have the capacity to transform us and transfer our skills from the virtual to the actual environment

(Barab, Scott, Siyahhan, Goldstone, Ingram-Goble, Zuiker & Warren, 2009; Koo & Seider, 2010; Phelps, 2010).

When there is no right or wrong choice, the teaching of ethics through play becomes complex – decisions are made based on personal value systems and an understanding of the context at hand (McDaniel & Fiore, 2010). Koo & Seider (2010) argue in favour of game design that models desired values through content or rules. In this way, a player's ethical standpoint and development can be "shaped and encouraged" (p. 15), which can be a life-long process (Vikaros & Degand, 2010).

How can we know that moral education can happen? According to Schrier et al. (2010), to "navigate our globally interconnected, rapidly evolving world" we need to learn to use games to "foster the development of ethical reasoning skills and encourage citizenship" (p. 255). Does a role-playing game help a player overcome his own prejudices (Phelps, 2010)? Not necessarily. Our own livelihood must be at stake in order for us to care and be responsible; only then can we really be transformed by the experience (Phelps, 2010).

Svelch (2010) posits that not all games have been made to promote moral development, but that good games will include moral choices and dilemmas, containing "an implicit system of morality" (p. 59). Good videogames must be both entertaining and instructive and must present effective teaching tools (Staines, 2010).

Context -- the situation in which a person acts -- is critical for making ethical decisions. Role-playing games presents environments in which such situations and opportunities to practise take place, and this enables situated learning (Simkins & Steinkuehler, 2008). RPGs are also favourable for observing such actions. Simkins and Steinkuehler identify a number of factors which are important for developing skills of critical reasoning. Expanding on Simkins and Steinkuehler's (2008) important factors, Raphael, Bachen, Lynn, Baldwin-Philippi, & McKee (2010) make a distinction between civic training and civic education and between games that teach "about basic citizenship roles (voting, participating in organizations, and the like) and about civic leadership (running for office, starting or running organizations, and so on)" (p. 218).

ARGs, on the verge of the imaginary and the actual, demand that participants make choices with an impact on their lives outside the game. Such games, according to Macklin (2010) trouble

the concept of the magic circle. When players are asked to interact with people in public, the boundaries of what is ‘inside’ and what is ‘outside’ the game disappear. The ethical norms and rules move into the public space, and other questions arise around moral values and the right of the game to intrude into that public space. How ethical is it to conceal the fact that actions players take are part of a game and not actual? Should players be visibly marked, as in Macklin’s example of *Re:Activism*, whose participants wore matching-colour bandannas? Through this gesture, the players reestablished the boundaries of the magic circle and visibly invited people to spontaneous play. Simkins, on the other hand, advocates that the boundaries of the magic circle be “nurtured, protected and enforced” (2010, p. 83).

Can video games teach us about the future, help us predict what could happen, and prevent catastrophes or negative behaviour (Phelps, 2010)? Phelps claims that “as game players, we are not just systemic thinkers, but ethical actors” (p. 145).

Context

Ample research has focused on how video games affect various aspects of human life, and much attention has been given to negative aspects of video gaming such as violence and addiction. I wanted to explore whether games, especially Alternate Reality Games (ARG) in which the main interaction is through a narrative, have the power to influence change and ethical sensibility. My interest focused on human behaviour, the way narratives are presented and interpreted, and the establishment of human relationships based on those narratives in ARGs.

My research questions were as follows:

- 1) What critical literacy practices are evidenced in human play in immersive gameworlds?
- 2) How can players and educators who use these spaces develop knowledge and application of critical literacy and grow as individuals in their ethical sensibilities?

The game selected for this research was *Urgent Evoke*. It was an online game, officially launched on March 2 and it ended on May 12, 2010. It lasted for ten weeks. Each week a quest and a mission were identified that Agents (players) needed to complete. Those were introduced by a scenario set in the future, and presented in the form of a comic strip and they were related to the

most troublesome world issues, such as poverty, food, water crisis and so on. Agents were expected to tackle this mission in different ways: complete a quest related to the topic; and accomplish three separate tasks: Learn, Act and Imagine.

At the end of the last week of the game, the Agents were asked to submit an “Evocation”, a proposal for a project, if interested. The project had to reflect a sound idea, with good strategies for realization. It needed to have a potential to make a change in local community. The best projects were rewarded with \$1,000 US to start up, or with a mentorship (consulting services by a successful professional in the field). There were other “comforting awards” given by the World Bank Institute, such as the Certificates “Class of 2010” for participating in the crash course in changing the world, for those who completed all the quests and missions.

The research study attempted to explore the impact of Alternate Reality Game, *Evoke*, on participants’ real-life, and the occurrence of potential changes in their beliefs, values and ethical behaviour expressed or discussed in the game. These elements were explored through pre and post-game online surveys and interviews (using Skype), as well as through text analysis of the players’ narrative contributions in blogs and comments. To analyze the participants reasoning, attitudes and relations to other players, a Four-component model of moral functioning was used (Narvaez and Lapsley, 2005), exploring moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral motivation and moral action.

Six individuals were recruited for this study, two from Serbia, two from Auckland, one from Rwanda, and one from Uganda. The artifacts collected were from participants’ blog postings, comments and image and video uploads into *Evoke* space. Those were analyzed by using text and video/image qualitative analysis software, HyperResearch.

The results suggest that the most frequent moral functioning throughout the whole period was moral judgment, which indicates that people constantly apply moral reasoning to their actions and the actions of others. They express their beliefs and state their values. Those are that guide them in any situations. The power of this particular game was in creating leaders and motivating the players to make social changes. Based on the collected evidence, it is demonstrated that the moral action function considerably increased during the duration of the game in comparison to the time before and after the game. The results also indicate that the moral sensitivity is the strongest in the area of the participants’ interaction with each others, shown primarily in the comments section.

In accordance to the Four-component model, four different topics around critical literacy and morality of actions emerged and were discussed: 1) supporting and understanding others (as a part of the moral sensitivity function), 2) becoming a leader (as a part of the moral action function), 3) being a good citizen and choosing good values (as a part of the moral motivation function), and 4) freedom of speech (as a part of the moral judgment function). In all four areas, the ARG offered a fertile space for growth and learning. This is done through discussion, negotiations, and reflection. Therefore, I argue that ARGs that are designed so that they motivate the players to first, contribute to the game and second, through that contribution make changes in their real life, could be successfully used to encourage sensitivity to questions of ethics.

Method of Analysis

To respond to the research questions and understand and interpret the complexity of human agency for my analysis, I investigated a few frameworks to find the one that would suit my work. I stayed away from language or linguistic analysis of the text since English was a non-native language for all the research participants. Certain language constructs, such as sentence structure, politeness, or directness, might have been a reflection of first-language structure or insufficient proficiency in English rather than intentionality. I tried to understand the meaning of the utterance, general modes of consciousness, and specific worldviews (Jensen, 1989). Analysis was not done on a lexical or semantic level; instead, one or more paragraphs were used as the analytical unit.

I employed the four-component model of Moral Functioning developed by James Rest and his colleagues (1999) as an initial conceptual framework. I then shifted to use of Narvaez and Lapsley's later modification of the same model (2005). Based on Kohlberg's pivotal work on socio-cognitive developmental stages, Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau and Thoma (1999) took a critical approach towards theories of moral development at the end of the 20th century that focused primarily on moral judgment. They expanded the model to include other inner psychological processes that impact human behaviour: moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral motivation, and moral character. This is how Rest et al. explain the four processes:

- 1) Moral sensitivity (interpreting the situation, role-taking, how various actions affect the parties concerned, imagining cause-effect chains of events, and being aware that there is a moral problem when it exists);

- 2) Moral judgment (judging which action would be most justifiable in a moral sense);
- 3) Moral motivation (the degree of commitment to taking the moral course of action, valuing moral values over other values, and taking personal responsibility for moral outcomes);
- 4) Moral character (persisting in a moral task, having courage, overcoming fatigue and temptations, and implementing subroutines that serve a moral goal). (Rest, p. 101)

This four-component model was later used for developing moral education programs in the United States; according to Rest et al. (1999) it led to Educational Leadership programs in 1990s public schools that taught “moral literacy” (p. 102). Narvaez and Lapsley (2005) worked further on this model, expanding it to include skills and subskills.

Generally, the four-component model was applicable to my study. The main categories -- judgment, sensitivity, focus (motivation), and action -- fit well in my analysis; however, I found the division in skills and subskills tended to be too specific in some cases, not allowing flexibility in understanding participant behaviour more broadly. I therefore used the four categories as a skeleton and skills and subskills as a scaffolding device to support the evidence of moral functioning.

Results

Moral Functioning and Collected Evidence

It was evident in *Urgent Evoke* that the focus of moral functioning shifted at different stages of the game, beginning with a higher number of instances of moral judgment (at the outset of the game), shifting to moral action (during actual gameplay), and finally to moral sensitivity and motivation (after playing the game) (Fig. 1).

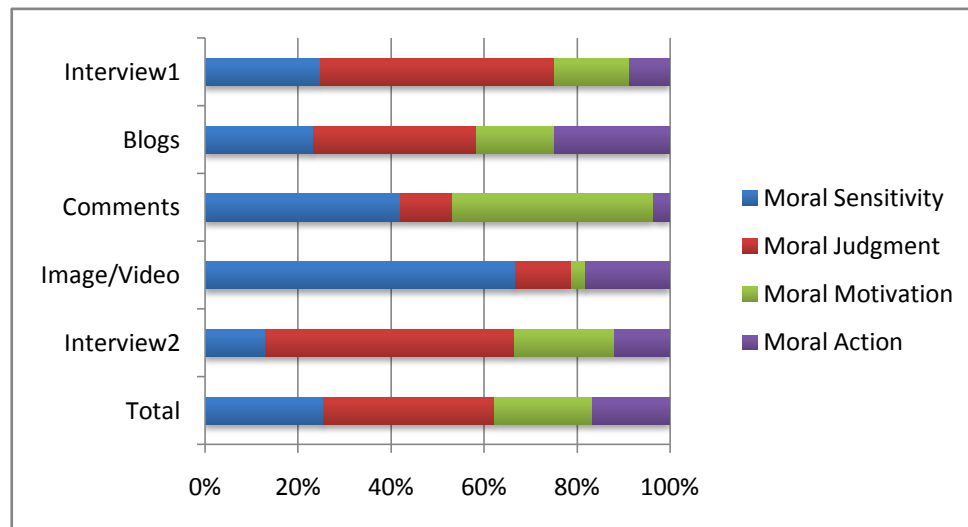


Figure 1 The difference in focus of moral functioning at different stages in the game

The first set of data, collected in the pre-game interview, demonstrated the highest level of the moral judgment subcategory (75 instances). Next, there was a split between moral sensitivity (37 instances) and moral motivation (26 instances). The most frequent code in the moral sensitivity subcategory was <interpretingsituations>, in which research participants explained their positions and tried to determine what was happening; the most frequent code in moral motivation was <developingidentity>, which was connected to players establishing themselves in the new community and through the task ahead.

The second set of data, collected through participant blog postings, shows a shift in moral functioning. Excluding the moral judgment subcategory (178 instances), it is noticeable that players focused more on moral action (126 instances) while maintaining a very high score in the moral sensitivity subcategory (118 instances). The most frequent code in the moral action subcategory was <takinginitiativeasaleader> (87 instances). Agents, engaged in game tasks and missions, took active roles in local communities and interacted with other players online. This time, the most frequent code in the moral sensitivity subcategory was <connectingtoothers>, in which participants listened to other people's experiences, sought common ground, and searched for potential partners for projects in actual life.

The third set of data included an analysis of comments posted by the research participants; the fourth set of data included the limited upload of images and videos. In the Comments data, the

moral motivation (63 instances) and moral sensitivity (61 instances) subcategories came to the forefront. Participants generally avoided expressing ethical judgments but were generous in expressing support and encouragement. The most frequent code in the set in which research participants used images and videos to illustrate their points was <interpretingsituations>; this code marked instances in which they offered additional information on their blog postings, explaining what was happening in the photos or video.

The final set of data, collected in the exit interview, was strongest in the moral judgment subcategory (112 instances). The participants were reflecting on the process of the game, their participation, and the outcome. It is interesting to note the drop in focus on moral action (25 instances). This may be due to the design of the survey and interview questions, which concentrated more on the game experiences and less on future actions.

Emerging Themes

One of the interesting aspects of *Evoke* was its potential connection to a player's activities outside the gameworld; this relates to the potential for educational re-use of *Evoke* or similar games. Players did not have to role-play or imagine their characters. They could be and act as themselves. Real intrinsic motivation to either write or do something in their local communities was a driving force throughout the game. Without an explicitly-expressed focus on moral behaviour, *Evoke* gave players numerous opportunities for exploring how people acted and reacted to others, how they grappled with problems in actual life, how they tried to help without being asked or obliged to do so, and how they immediately connected with others through similarity of ideas or personal experiences.

A number of themes related to morality emerged as valuable milestones for education; these include the drive to lend a hand, to support or express understanding and empathy, to take a leadership role and call for action for a better future, to improve ethical conditions, and to fight for human rights. All these issues are presented through Narvaez and Lapsley (2005)'s four-model framework. If games are to help us develop critical thinking skills, they need to inspire or trigger ethical sensibility or self-reflection.

An effective mode of self-reflection is through narrative and critical literacy. Therefore, in the context of *Urgent Evoke* I looked at what: 1) Moral action meant in terms of taking

responsibility and/or a leadership role (e.g. activism in the local community); 2) Moral motivation meant in terms of identity-building and choosing good values (e.g. plagiarism and presentation of self); 3) Moral sensitivity meant in terms of supporting and understanding others. (e.g. connecting to others or offering support and encouragement); and 4) Moral judgment meant in terms of reasoning ethically and analyzing ethical problems (e.g. freedom of speech) (Fig. 2)



Figure 2 The themes around moral functioning that emerged from the study

Becoming a leader

As many game theorists suggest, gamespaces are fruitful environments for informal and formal ethical education (Raphael, et al., 2010). Some teachers use commercial games in classrooms to teach ethical education. They engage youth in expressing their opinions, practicing problem solving, and collaborative decision-making. Role-playing games allow the participants to explore otherwise inaccessible institutional, geographical, and temporal settings (Raphael, et al., 2010).

Evoke, as an ARG, went a step further, enabling players to act as themselves and not only learn about leadership skills but practice them in both virtual and actual communities. Raphael et al. (2010) hypothetically claim (this was very likely realized in *Evoke*) that games can be designed to increase participant motivation by asking players to consult sources outside the game, provide various perspectives on controversial ideas and issues, rely on distributed knowledge to find solutions, and develop through these actions leadership skills transferrable to actual life.

As Raphael et al. (2010) posit, games like *Evoke* that allow players to set their own goals are more likely to lead to ethical growth than games with preset goals. Every player in *Evoke* was specifically asked to set up his/her goals on a weekly basis and to report back to the community with results or comments. In response, some participants took an active role in local neighbourhoods as they attempted to change the current state of affairs.

Being a good citizen

Sentwali (pseudonym), a participant from Rwanda, was a very active player from the time he joined the *Evoke* community, sometimes uploading more than one post per day. As he explained in his first interview, he was very excited to learn from others and be part of an international group of people. Sentwali saw this as a rare opportunity; many citizens of Rwanda did not have access to a computer or the skills required to contribute to the “world conversation” (Sentwali_Profile).

After almost a month of participation, Sentwali posted a text in his blog that was obviously (based on the language) borrowed from another source rather than his own thoughts. This resulted in fewer comments by other players and several requests for Sentwali to reference his sources.

Illegitimate textual appropriation or plagiarism is a matter of heated debate between theorists and experts, especially in today’s digital era when ‘borrowing’ is so easy. One side of the coin displays a picture of ‘illegitimate users’ whose first language is not the one from which they are borrowing. might well be a way of learning the language, and may result from a lack of ability to express oneself well enough in the second language. The other side of the coin shows ‘illegitimate users’ who, in addition to speaking a non-native language, come from a different cultural background which might not perceive the use of someone else’s words as a criminal or punishable act. On the contrary, some cultures promote collective ownership of creative material, believing no ownership of an idea is possible (Shi, 2006). An exact reciting of a text is considered an expression of education that demonstrates familiarity with reputable sources (Beute, Aswegen & Winberg, 2008). Why were some players upset, then, when Sentwali took content from another Web page? If he spent time searching for writing that coincided with his own ideas, made an effort to adapt it with a few of his personal comments, and offered it as understandable, correct English, why was he ‘punished’ by unfriendly responses from players more focused on pointing out that his practice was ‘wrong’ than on the ideas he wanted to share?

Supporting and understanding others

The research results suggest three primary reasons for engaging in dialogue: sharing personal experience and resources; asking for further information or clarification; and expressing agreement and support. Supporting and encouraging others was one of the most obvious, easily-identifiable behaviours in the analysis of comments left by players for each other.

In the exit interview, participants were asked a question about the possibility of people from different parts of the world, with different cultural, social, economic, and educational backgrounds, being able to understand each other and work together. The question was whether a game like “Evoke,” which opens a forum for conversation, could bridge that gap. Most of the participants thought such understanding was possible.

Freedom of speech

At the end of March, 2010, an *Evoke Code of Ethics* was posted on the *EVOKEblog*. This was triggered by a series of events, one of them being complaints about censorship and filtering of the content that the game designers found inappropriate or irrelevant for solving the problem at hand.

While the announcement and publication of the ‘Code of Ethics’ provoked positive, supportive comments, a social network with a high number of participants, such as *Evoke* (almost 20 000) could not exist for ten weeks without turbulence. Some players continued the discussion around freedom of speech, while others decided to ignore the whole issue and to make the most of the game until its conclusion. Eventually, the voices of those who called for reconciliation and a focus on positive outcomes and innovation prevailed.

This incident had a visible impact on the players; a loss of passion and de-motivation was obvious in the content contributions that followed. Those who had already invested a lot in the game and had high expectations for their results refrained from confrontation. Fear of penalization resulted in suppression of free speech and in self-censorship.

Discussion

In consideration of the research questions, critical literacy practices were examined, and the possible application of Alternate Reality Games, such as *Evoke* in educational practice – in particular whether they might be useful in fostering ethical sensibility.

Although the research participants valued the visual expressions (i.e. images and videos), their primary mode of communication was text. All five literary practices that Ciardiello (2004) identifies as the best practices that “enlighten the reader about the ulterior designs and multiple meanings of text” (p. 138) were present in my participants’ contributions. Those practices are: 1) examining multiple perspectives, 2) finding an authentic voice, 3) recognizing social barriers and crossing borders of separation, 4) regaining one’s identity, and 5) the call of service (Ciardiello, 2004, p. 139). Every text can have multiple meanings. Providing different perspectives helps readers view how text may be constructed based on personal values and cultural background. To better understand the other players, a participant from Uganda observed that he would go to their profile pages, read about them and “try to relate who they are and where they come from to what they are writing and see if there is any connection” (Mukasa, Exit interview_12859). Two participants talked about finding their authentic voices and being heard by others. Ciardiello emphasizes “crossing borders of separation” as one of the major critical literacy practices. A participant from Rwanda claimed to have bridged differences and social barriers in becoming a part of the *Evoke* community. He proudly talked about the friends he had met in the community, the relationships he had established, and the feeling of respect that he had felt by other players. The fifth of Ciardiello’s major key elements of critical literacy, the call of service, was evident in all six research participants’ contributions, from explicit talk about writing responsibly to comment on how the questions in the game encouraged reflection on local situation in New Zealand, but also thinking about the world on a global level.

Despite the participants’ freedom to voice their opinions, power dynamics were at times troublesome. Luke’s (2000) discussion of literacy education in Australia, although focused on formal education settings, is very relevant to the developed power relations in *Evoke*. He claims, “literacy education is always a situated response to particular political economies of education” (p. 449). Similarly, the *Evoke* community was created under the supervision of, and funded by, the World Bank, and had to exist inside the borders of a game design and arrangements that encouraged

a particular type and distribution of discourse. Clearly the fact that the World Bank sponsored the game influenced the way game Designers and Agents acted and the textual practices in which they engaged. Although social media spaces have been characterized as highly democratic, they remain subject to particular economies of knowing that prevail outside the gameworld.

From the start of the game, there was a belief in the potential of *Evoke* to be used for educational purposes. Community members such as the New York City Writing Project for English, Art and Technology classrooms expressed their intention to use *Urgent Evoke* in teaching. Teachers, primarily from the U.S., self-initiated a wiki page on which they posted suggestions for the classroom and ideas for collaborative projects. They also opened a google.doc in which teachers could share strategies and connect to each other.

Although a space like *Evoke* might be used in the context of formal education settings, this has not been the focus of this study with adult players and therefore I will not comment extensively on possibilities for use of the game in classrooms. Rather, I will consider implications for learning more broadly. In *Evoke* the players were from different parts of the world, were adults of varying ages, and participated in the learning process voluntarily. This diversity allowed for rich and challenging learning opportunities that required negotiation of customs and beliefs players brought to the game from their particular lifeworlds. Such non-traditional teaching and learning spaces appear to be worth considering in building capacity for global education.

Network communications technology has made the world ‘shrink’, connecting people from various parts of the planet who in previous generations would never have come in contact (Noddings, 2010). The need for global education (internationalization of education) or global citizenship has been put on the agenda of many higher education institutions (Abdi & Shultz, 2008; Richardson, 2008; Stearns, 2009). The implementation, however, is not yet smooth or beyond “admirable aspiration” (Haydon, 2006, p. 462). ‘Going global’ and collaborating or communicating with people from various cultural, educational and political backgrounds raises questions of ethics. If we are citizens of the world, to what extent do we have common core values? Dower (2008) argues that the core values of citizenship are “core values of dialogic and nonviolent communication, coupled with the acceptance of the universal status of all human beings and a sense of trans-society responsibility for what happens in the world” (p. 52). Kiss and Euben (2010) concur with Dower in taking a dialogical approach to moral education. Only through tolerance, readiness to

listen and reflective practice do we learn about what others value and how they live (Spelman, 2010).

Accessibility of information makes us more aware of events around the world and living conditions of others. There is still a huge gap between knowing about inequalities and injustices and doing something about them. The importance of ethics education, as Christie (2005) states, is to “challenge simple acceptance of ‘things as they are’” (p. 240) and develop a discourse on humanity, rights and citizenship. She argues that the traditional Western perspective on ethical reasoning and universal claims should be contested, allowing for different views, and for “think[ing] about ourselves as human beings in relation to others” (p. 242). Opening the floor for discussion, as happened in *Evoke* through gameplay, is one way to engage into such discourse. Both Christie (2005) and Chen (2011) argue for “bringing suffering into conversation” so that it can be acknowledged, rationalized, and ultimately lead to ethics of care. The research participants shared their life stories and everyday experiences in the context of a game (about young girls forced into prostitution, about the struggle for clean water, and about the civil war). Others responded with warm and supportive words, or with ideas for solutions.

Ethics education is closely related to citizenship education, or teaching individuals to be part of the world. Respect for others is often mentioned as a pillar of ethical behavior (Haydon, 2006). Hydon states that ‘respect’ has special importance in global citizenship education. He claims, “what is needed is respect, not for distinct cultures, but for human cultural contexts in all their variety” (p. 459). Results from this study revealed that respect for others and connecting to others (represented by the codes <respectingothers> and <connectingtoothers>) were the most common form of communication in the context of participants’ interactions with other players.

Richardson (2008) cautions us not to forget to acknowledge the influence of national culture. What it means to be ethical and to live ethically is challenging, as evident from the events in *Evoke*, which showed how ethics is highly contextual. Everyone brings into the community his/her own particular understanding of values and the ways of behavior. Creating games like *Evoke* and providing a setting for various perspectives to be brought together appears to be one method of teaching the contextual nature of ethics.

Using games in learning situations, especially in global educational practice, is a method that needs to be further explored, with attention to careful instructional designed. Many would agree

with Blackmon (2011): “we have to avoid the lure of bleeding-edge technologies without solid pedagogy.” Drawing on the rich work of James Gee and Donald Murray (1972), Blackmon states that much could be learned from game design, especially in the area of student engagement. Both Crecente (2011) and Nicole (2011) see true value in using game elements in education only if they are embedded in the learning process, allowing students to solve problems through collaboration and inquiry. Crecente gives an example of a new 12-week *Facebook* ARG called *America 2049*, in which players examine human rights in the United States and their own positions in relation to those rights. Participants have the opportunity to be in ‘someone else’s shoes’ and learn about various social and political issues.

An important element in using games for education is finding strategies for motivating the participants. Just as my research participants questioned the value of awards and points in *‘Urgent Evoke*, so do educators and researchers (Salter, 2011). Salter agrees with other game theorists, such as Zimmerman (2004) or McGonigal (2011), who argue that instant feedback is very important and sometimes even critical for players’ engagement. However, finding the balance between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is not easy. Of course, this is not a new problem in education.

Finally, bringing games into the realm of academic inquiry, as Welsh (2010) posits, invites interrogation of the attitude that games are unworthy of serious study and thus unworthy of use as a credible teaching method. This attitude derives from the historical view of games as purely entertaining discussed. The merging of theoretical and critical views with experiential and practical ones may take time, but ARGs like *Urgent Evoke* demonstrate that immersive gameworlds can provide space for rich, exhilarating, thought-provoking debate and knowledge building.

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