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Digital Gaming, Ethics and Teacher Education

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Digital Gaming, Ethics and Teacher Education

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I. Introduction

The aim of this paper is mainly to develop connections among three areas: teacher education, ethics and digital game studies. Based on a recently developed research conducted in a public federal university in Brazil, with would-be English language teachers, I present three possible courses of action which teachers can take when faced with unexpected situations: i) ignore them and stick to the plan; ii) lecture students about the issue raised by the situation; iii) integrate these issues into classroom practice. Obviously, a combination of them is also possible, but each one of these choices implies different consequences, having an impact not only in the classroom, but also in the lives of the students. This is where digital gaming may be of specific value for teacher education, since impromptu situations in the classroom tend to involve instant decisions, not previously provided for in the lesson plan. The interconnection among the three areas of investigation in the above mentioned research project had a prominent role in examining how these undergraduate students and would-be teachers connect the decision making process in digital games with real life and classroom situations, especially when involving ethical issues. The results presented and discussed here may be particularly useful in leading teachers/players to become more aware of the values and experiences that inform their views of the world and of reality.

I will start with a brief discussion about ethical decision making in digital games. Afterwards I will present a few works dealing with teacher education that are relevant for the issue at hand. Finally I will bring some data from the above mentioned investigation, followed by a brief discussion of the results.

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II. Ethics and Digital Game Studies

In this section, before presenting some approaches related to ethics in digital gaming, I will bring about some issues commonly addressed in the specialized literature of digital games. Two of those are relevant for my discussion: i) the debate around narratology vs. ludology; ii) and the relationship between the "magic circle" (HUIZINGA, 1971) and digital games. Regarding the first issue, do digital games fit the criteria of traditional narratives (MURRAY, 1997) or do they belong to a totally new and different category (AARSETH, 2004)? This is a question that has been raising a good deal of discussion. According to Murray (1997, p. 142), every game "is a kind of abstract storytelling that resembles the world of ordinary experience but compresses it to intensify interest." For Ryan (RYAN, 2004, p. 333), both games and narratives are inspired by life, which is why they share a few similarities. However, narrative would relate to life as representation – with an eye to the past – while games would relate to life as simulation – with an eye to the future. Aarseth, on the other hand, believes that digital games need to be freed from "narrativism" (2004: 362) in order to build an alternative theory proper to their field of study. For him, what moves players is not the narrative, because playfulness can only be guaranteed by overcoming obstacles. The author refers more specifically to adventure games, whose purpose is to enable players to accomplish these goals. "It is this, and not the narrative, that is the dominant structure", emphasizes him (AARSETH, 2004, p. 368), because once a goal is achieved it becomes past, and the player goes on to pursue another goal. And this is why he believes that this type of game should not be classified as story. A "more useful terminology" would be "quest games" (p. 375).

Broadly speaking, these two approaches can be described as narratology and ludology. While the former resorts to "existing literary and humanities methods of understanding texts" for studying games, the latter argues that "a computer game is not a conventional text at all but an activity more akin to play or sport" (DOVEY; KENNEDY, 2006, p. 22).

As I noted elsewhere (ZACCHI, 2017), one may question, however, the real need to create a new category for narrative in digital games when there is already an entire existing theory, which is not static.

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Narrativity is a category that is in constant transformation, regardless of the object to which it is applied, let alone a highly dynamic medium such as the digital game. Murray's (1997, p. 53) account about her experience with the game *Planetfall* is quite illustrative of the importance of the narrative in the game. At a certain moment Floyd, one of the characters of the game, sacrifices himself for the player. According to her, "At this point, the game ceases to be a puzzle, a challenge, and becomes an evocative theatrical experience. The escape from the planet continues, but without Floyd's company the player feels lonely and dismayed." Murray draws attention to the dramatic load of the episode: the challenges will continue to be completed, but the experience for the player will no longer be the same. For the author, therefore, digital games are a new medium for storytelling, since "new traditions of storytelling" (p. 28) follow from previous ones; they are continuous and feed off each other in both form and content. Simkins and Steinkuehler (2008, p. 338) state that readers are constantly "coconstructing" and actively repurposing texts. Nevertheless, they also believe that the narratology vs. ludology debate has been "overblown", placing in sharp contrast "approaches that are not necessarily incompatible".

In *Detroit* (BUHL, 2018), a more recent game, whether it is true that you have to overcome challenges or not, it is quite clear that the narrative plays a much more relevant role in the development of the gameplay. Whereas the choices that the player makes are very important for the plot, having strong influence in the outcome of the narrative, the achievement of quests is something quite simple. All you have to do is follow the game's instructions about what controls to use, so that you can keep the narrative going. In this case, it is very difficult to agree with Aarseth (2004) in that this is the dominant structure of the game. In fact the game gives you the opportunity to replay the chapter in case you are not happy with the outcome of the story and the possible impacts it will have over the narrative. It is a choice, however, that does not interfere in the progression of the gameplay, since whether you completely solve the puzzle or not the game will still go on. For this kind of games, then, narrative and gameplay go hand in hand. The player may choose to replay a chapter either to improve his or her stats or to have an outcome more akin to his or her identity (ZACCHI, 2018). This approach is in line with Dovey and Kennedy's (2006, p. 86) proposal of methodological hybridity to expand and develop a more inclusive understanding of digital games, involving both the structuralist analysis "so dear to ludologists" and a cultural approach through representation, narrative and intertextuality.

Another important aspect in digital games is that of agency. Differently from printed text and cinema, and similarly to hypertext, digital gaming in general allows the user to make choices that will most often influence the narrative. This means that different players can take different paths, or the same player can take different paths each time he or she plays the same game, as I mentioned in the previous paragraph. Murray (1997, p. 128), however, claims that agency goes beyond mere participation or activity. It requires autonomy and a wide range of possible choices. Aarseth (2004, p. 366) believes that choices are an integral part of any game. However, in early adventure games, according to him, one had the impression that the dominant plot was discovered by the player, but in fact it was present from the beginning. What characterized them, therefore, was the rediscovery of the only possible path. Again, in *Detroit* (BUHL, 2018), as mentioned above, the narrative changes according to the choices made by the player, but the gameplay is quite predictable.

Regarding agency, Schott (2006, p. 134) points out that playing is not very different from other human activities. Agency, according to him, implies more than simply responding to a stimulus. It also implies exploring and manipulating the environment and trying to exert influence over it. Just as in real life, therefore, the act of playing involves regulated activities in environments that constrain behaviour. But while players may seek to conform to these constraints, they may also attempt to transgress them and exert some kind of control. For Schott (p.139), agency therefore presupposes an intentionality, so that players may act with a view to generating certain future events. However, nothing guarantees that these outcomes will be achieved. Thus, players' actions and intentions (just as in real life) can lead to unplanned, or even unwanted, outcomes.

As I noted elsewhere (ZACCHI, p. 2020), the idea behind the statement "This is just a game" has been considerably challenged (MAGNANI, 2014a; FLANAGAN; NISSENBAUM, 2016). On the level of game design, Flanagan and Nissenbaum (2016, p. 164) argue that the justification translated into the phrase "this is just a game" minimizes the act of game creation and denies its power to reflect and shape culture. Also, although decisions made during the gameplay do not have concrete consequences in real life, they often contain implications that can intertwine with attitudes taken in real life, affecting the player's identities in some way (ZACCHI, 2018). This view goes against what Huizinga (1971) called the "magic circle", the second issue mentioned at the beginning of this section. For him, by intensely absorbing the player, the game moment is detached from his or her everyday life and does not interfere with it. Crawford and Rutter (2006, p. 159) counter this view and claim that players are not "transported to another place," but are physically and socially situated in a very real world, which "will shape their game (and those of other players), which in turn will have consequences in the real world."

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Dovey and Kennedy (2006, p. 29) argue that the magic circle defines a separate space for play, and for them the space occupied by digital games is not a utopian space. It can be experienced differently on the basis of several factors, such as age, geography, gender, ethnicity or class. For them, this view privileges an understanding of the relationships between play and cultural contexts rather than strictly structural accounts of digital gaming.

For Consalvo (2009, p. 411), the idea of the magic circle also presupposes a structuralist definition of game. So she advocates for a view of the game as a contextual, dynamic activity. In that case, meaning can only be made by the engagement of players with the game. In this process, they bring some outside knowledge into their gaming situations. And that is, she continues, "where the game occurs and where we must find its meaning" (p. 415). In conclusion, she rules out the possibility of games being magic circles, "where the ordinary rules of life do not apply" (p. 416). For her these rules apply, but "in relation to multiple contexts, across varying cultures, and into different groups, legal situations, and homes."

As put forward by Dovey and Kennedy (2006, p. 23 – emphasis added), "games are not static media texts – they are *activities*". Such a statement places additional emphasis on the ethical dimension of digital games, going beyond the aesthetic role of interpretation, traditionally ascribed to other forms of narrative, such as literature and cinema. As I noted elsewhere (ZACCHI, 2020), a performative ethics – defined in the act of playing itself, but in dialogue with ways of acting in the world – would be more suitable for the experience with digital games. The game is a contextual, meaning-making process (CONSALVO, 2009, p. 413). Therefore, meaning is constructed in play. The idea of a performative ethics could be a relevant contribution to the dualistic view of ethics as either normative or descriptive. Since most of these games involve communities of players, usually online, the decisions made during the game may reflect worldviews and ways of acting that take place in these communities. At the same time, they contribute for the construction of these modes and views, which implies, again, a strong cultural component. As Sicart (2009, p. 112) states, "There is a responsibility for the way players construct the ethical environment of the community of players, for the way players relate to each other, and for the kinds of practice they allow or disallow in the gaming experience." In such cases, decisions cannot be seen as actions that will take place only in the universe of the game, but they may have implications for life in society and for the redefinition of subjectivities.

When categorizing theories within philosophy of ethics according to their commitments, Simkins and Steinkuehler (2008, p. 334) make use of a framework composed of two axes: normative/descriptive axis and dogmatic/critical axis. In their opinion, "Descriptive, critical ethics is the most (if not only) appropriate framework for education in ethical reasoning in a democratic society" (p. 336). However, the idea of an ethical reasoning suggests that most ethical attitudes have their place of origin in the mind, as a result of rational thinking. This idea limits moral choices to a rational, mind-based process. Also, the normative/descriptive axis may not be enough to account for decision making in specific situations, more specifically for the teacher in the classroom. This is why a performative approach may be more comprehensive in this case.

Even so, Simkins and Steinkuehler take further steps to overcome such dualities. They place great emphasis on experience and action for developing critical ethical skills: "we find that developing skills of critical ethical reasoning requires active participation in difficult decisions as they arise in context" (p. 347). Difficult decisions in context are quite pervasive for the teacher in the classroom. Finally, they also add an extra feature to the narratology-ludology pattern: affect, turning it into a triad. The addition of affect to the act of playing, and therefore to the act of making (moral) decisions during game play, can drift it away from a solely mental process and enrich the critical dimension. According to them (p. 351), affect "emphasizes the experiential quality of the game, highlighting the personal connection players can have toward an RPG. […] In some cases, they even want to relate the game to their own lives".

For Sicart (2009, p. 160), ethical decisions in the game must imply consequences and "reward subsystems" linked to those decisions. Otherwise, the player will react to the dilemmas not from a moral instance, but from "her player logic" to achieve the necessary goals in the game (or to accomplish quests, according to Aarseth (2004)). Therefore, choices will only make some ethical sense if they bring consequences that make players reflect on their actions, even in cases where there is no choice to make but force players to reflect on their attitude and how it is or is not in tune with their social values. Thus, that does not apply to morally reprehensible attitudes that are already implicit in the rules and mechanics of the game. And it is not to do with the values conveyed by the game as a result of the intentions and interests of the creators. Even so, Sicart proposes some categorizations for games that contain ethical content in their creation process (SICART, 2009, p. 214-217). The first one divides games into open and closed ones. The open ones take into account the values of the player and his or her community, which can be used to develop a relationship with the game world. The closed ones create an ethical experience that does not allow the player to access his or her values beyond the boundaries of the game. This second category is

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subdivided again into two others: subtracting ethics and mirroring ethics (2009, p. 215). Subtracting ethics creates a moral experience but leaves the ethical reflection to the player. Mirroring ethics, on the other hand, while presupposing the player as a moral being, forces the player to put himself or herself in a position that may make him or her uncomfortable, limiting his or her options for ethical decision making. This reinforces the following statement by Pointon (2015, p. 12): if the player cannot change the narrative of the game, then every choice leads to the same ending. Soon, he or she is left with only the possibility to "obey!", or give up on completing the game.

Kalantzis and Cope's open and closed rhetorics (2020) resemble in some way Sicart's (2009) definitions of open and closed ethical games. Kalantzis and Cope's focus is on the meaning making process in the production and interpretation of texts. So, while closed rhetoric "Sets out to limit the scope for meaning of interpreters" (2020, p. 202), open rhetoric "Anticipates the possibility of differences in interpretation, making space for alternatives" (p. 203). In their multifunctional categorization, rhetoric is under interest and not agency, which might be more suitable for analyzing digital games.

As for Simkins and Steinkuehler's proposal (2008, p. 349), one of the criteria which the authors pose for fostering ethical decision making is social context. The games under this category allow players "not only to experience their own character's role in a given social world but also to engage with other members of it." And they also "provide an in-game cultural framework for interpretation in some way" (p. 350). The game used in this research, *Life is strange* (see below), can be said to fall mainly in the categories of open games (SICART, 2009), open rhetoric (KALANTZIS; COPE, 2020) and social context (SIMKINS; STEINKUEHLER, 2008).

III. Digital Games and the Classroom: Expecting the Unexpected

There is an extensive literature about digital games and learning (GEE, 2004; ZACCHI, 2017; SQUIRE, 2006; MAGNANI, 2014b; SIMKINS; STEINKUEHLER, 2008), but not so much about digital games and teacher education. My concern here is about the use of commercial games and not educational (or the so called serious) ones.

As I have already noted (ZACCHI, 2020), from the player's point of view in particular, there are several instances where ethics can be invoked when it comes to digital games. The first one is the choice of genre itself. Many players already know beforehand if a game is violent or not or if it presupposes certain "condemnable" attitudes in real life. The games in the *GTA* series have become famous for their "gratuitous violence" content. Those who choose to play them usually know what they will find. But the fact that a person chooses a game of dubious ethical content does not imply that he or she is in favor of this content. After all, an ethical attitude does not apply to the choice of a game or a genre, but to how to play it.

The sense of ethics in this work can refer both to the adherence or not to a set of collectively negotiated behaviors and rules and to a way of acting in the world. Although the emphasis has fallen on the first sense, it is relevant to think about how the reflections derived from the actions in the game can point to new ways of acting in the world, creating, consequently, conditions for the construction of new subjectivities. This vision of ethics implies a performative approach, distancing itself from merely descriptive or normative conceptions of behavior, as I mentioned above.

In a previous project, I put forward the idea that foreign language teachers nowadays are exposed to a number of factors that can challenge not only their authority, but also the very knowledge about the subjects that they are supposed to teach (ZACCHI, 2015). If in previous times teachers were recognized as the holders of knowledge par excellence – and by means of which they would exert their authority – nowadays they are dependent on the context of the classroom as a starting point from which to design the contents of their classes. The teacher is thus forced to deal with the unknown, the uncertain, the unexpected.

I put forward the necessity to change the culture of teaching so as to reflect the shifting identities that are in play nowadays. In order to better prepare citizens for present-day societies, we have to match the school world and the lifeworlds of the students. And since teachers cannot predict what those lifeworlds are or will be, they should be prepared for the different. Students' sociocultural backgrounds should be taken into account, regarding their place of origin, religion, ethnicity, gender, social class, among others. Therefore, it is heterogeneity rather than homogeneity that education should aim at in order to prepare people "for the unpredictability of engagement with lifeworld differences" so that they can recognize and negotiate those differences effectively (COPE; KALANTZIS, 2000, p. 130).

In conclusion, I argued that the context is also constantly changing, in part due to the myriad of online and offline networks in which learners take part nowadays. As a result, both contexts and identities keep shifting. We should aim then at a flexible and unknown student. The emphasis, in this case, is placed on performance rather than on competence. Difference could then be seen as a starting point, rather than as an obstacle (ZACCHI; NASCIMENTO, 2019). That can also be the cause of a great deal of uncertainty, since difference presupposes conflict and builds on performatively, on a daily basis. Preparing teachers for such a situation is one of the greatest challenges in

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teacher education, since according to Biesta "Education, in short, […] must prepare for the incalculable" (2009, p. 35).

According to Santana and Zacchi (2022), in digital gaming some situations or attitudes may result in events that are beyond the player's control, requiring most of the time a quick action to solve or at least get out of that situation. This unpredictability shows that at any moment the player can be surprised with some event, in a completely unexpected environment, where anything, eventually, can happen.

This unpredictability is undoubtedly one of the many attributes of society taken into games, as "we live in a rhizomatic world, of interculturalities, juxtapositions and different complexities" (MENEZES DE SOUZA, 2011, p. 292). These complexities are present in all spheres that we know and that make up the social environment, including the classroom.

Seeing this link built between the complexities of the real world and their interconnection in games, it is also fitting to reflect on the relationship between the classroom and this real world that is being discussed here, knowing that, besides being players, the informants of this research are also future English language teachers (see below). Initially, it is necessary to consider that today's teachers need to deal with new ways of constructing knowledge and meanings, which also include digital games and other digital spaces.

New ways of learning emerge daily, which can change how individuals think and act, directly impacting the classroom, where "the teacher must deal with the media that the student is used to using outside the classroom, the internet especially, [and] video games" (MENEZES DE SOUZA, 2011, p. 279-280). Based on these assumptions, Menezes de Souza (2011, p. 279) refers to today's world as "a globalized world, a world of complexities, which forces us to act in a different way in our classrooms", i.e. to act more ethically and responsibly as educators. He highlights, however, that the practices adopted, especially in the scope of English language, even after numerous studies on new learning methods, are still shaped without taking into account this dialogue between society and the classroom, which results in a decontextualized teaching.

In line with this idea of instability in the classroom, Monte Mór's (2018, p. 273-274) approach to teacher education is based on what she calls a design-redesign process, which involves both theory and practice. The theoretical and practical choices imply mixing the conventional – as suggested by the academic program – with what escapes the standard – the varied texts that trigger strangeness, non-linearity, that confront different points of view, that provoke reflections on centralities and margins, colonialities, naturalizations, homogeneities and heterogeneities. Hence the design-redesign is done according to the contents of the teacher education programs, but from a critical perspective. In reading activities, she calls the attention to the role of the participants – students or teachers – as meaning makers, which gives them the opportunity to reconstruct meanings, to rewrite or produce printed, digital or audiovisual texts; to adapt didactic units from books; to redesign didactic-pedagogical plans; to elaborate collectively.

Nascimento (2021, p. 81) adds to the proposal of a critical teacher education by pointing out the complexity involved in it. Therefore, she advocates for the necessity to adopt theories that help to understand, explain and act in view of the connections among teacher education, teaching and the world around us. For her, digital literacies are among those theories, and digital media have great potential for developing a critical stance (p. 90) in education. In the context of an increasing process of social digitization, she calls our attention to the development of new ways of knowledge construction, which happen mainly through digital media and can also affect teacher education.

IV. The Research

Bearing all these issues in mind, I decided to start a project involving digital gaming, ethical choices and English language teacher education. The main objective was to investigate how future English teachers connect game ethics with real life ethics and English teaching. As a first premise, we wanted to understand how these would-be teachers could benefit from making impromptu decisions in games and apply them in their practice.

Initially, a group was created on the Steam platform (store.steampowered.com), where it is possible, besides having access to a variety of games, to participate in discussions, forums and other activities. We then invited informants/students from an English Language and Literature course at a federal public university who might be interested in taking part in the research. In the end, 9 male students and 5 female students volunteered, with age ranging from 18 to 32 years. All of them were familiar with digital gaming. The research team consisted of myself (as coordinator) and 3 undergraduate junior researchers.

The first stage of data collection consisted of filling out a questionnaire, which aimed to identify the participants' relationships with digital games. Then, the discussions were started through the Steam platform, whose topics brought the guiding questions of the research in more detail. The interaction process took place as follows: the researchers created topics on the main themes of the research and posted questions, and the participants answered these questions and gave suggestions. In total, throughout the year of 2020, six topics were created, ranging from 1 to 23 posts on each topic. Finally, six of the students completed the first two stages of the game *Life is Strange* (BAGHADOUST,

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2015), which is heavily focused on decision-making situations. The gameplays were recorded using the Windows 10 gaming software Xbox Game Bar to verify the players' choices and how they faced the ethical dilemmas they were confronted with during the game experience.

Life is Strange is a single player game. The game was released in episode format, which can be played separately, although they are interconnected in their narratives. In it, the player assumes the identity of Max, an introspective photography student at a renowned school in the city of Arcadia Bay. Max had recently returned after five years away from her hometown. Now, seeking to further her studies in photography under the guidance of Professor Mark Jefferson, she must deal with several choices presented to her during the game. It is up to her to interpret and judge them, and she is forced to make decisions in order to move the narrative forward, acting as a kind of mediator between the player, the game, and the decisions made.

Max discovers that she has a superpower to go back in time. This feature gives the player the option to reverse actions, which can happen in several different situations and are important to the progress of the narrative. As far as essential choices are concerned, whenever the player is confronted with one of them, a warning appears on the screen stating that "This action will have consequences". If the player is not satisfied with the result, he or she can use (most of the time) the power of the protagonist to go back in time and make a new choice, also changing the course of the narrative.

For the below analysis, I will make use of data generated from the first and second steps of data gathering: questionnaires and group discussions. I will also mainly focus on data regarding teacher education, taking into account that the research was aimed at pre-service English teachers. For the sake of contextualization, I will also provide some discussions about ethics and digital gaming.

Starting with the questionnaires, composed of both closed and open questions, the final one was specifically designed to assess how these would-be teachers might connect in-game attitudes with classrooms decisions:

> *Is it possible that the decisions made in a game can influence teaching practices and decision-making in the classroom? How do you – as a player and (future) teacher – see yourself in this process?*

Most of the answers were rather vague, not addressing the classroom directly, but focusing on general qualifications necessary for being a teacher. Some of them were quite strict. Cris simply answered, "Yes.", whereas Adrian stated: "I can't imagine a game that has the power to influence teaching."

Adrian's statement points to a relevant issue in relation to digital games and teaching. There is a common sense prevalent among undergraduate students that applying games to teaching means instrumentally taking them to the classroom. Our proposal with the project, which reflected in the above question, was to think of ways to bring the rationale behind decision making in games to the language classroom, and not necessarily making actual use of a specific digital game.

More in tune with this proposal, a few answers from the participants suggested ways to apply the knowledge obtained in games in the teaching practice. They were still very vague, although this is understandable in the initial stages of ethnographic research. Some examples are:

> […] by transposing the refusal to give up on winning the game into real life. (B.S.)
>
> Sometimes a team member is new to the game, […so] you need to have the responsibility, empathy and patience to help and teach this person. (klevertoncad)
>
> […] help fix a certain subject that is not being understood by everyone (larichows)
>
> […] strategy and brain games [to] get the teacher out of a complicated situation, especially with children, it can be anything from an icebreaker activity to an escape valve. (clev0425)

B.S. limits his answer to an attitude the player could take to real life, whereas larichows treats the experience with digital gaming as merely instrumental when applying it to the classroom. klevertoncad compares the task of instructing newbies in digital games to that of teaching. In fact, this comparison is only implicit, for he does not explicitly mention teaching or the classroom. Finally, clev0425 simply sees digital games as accessories for classroom control.

Then there is only one that touches the issue of ethics:

> The ideal in my opinion would be to ban the most violent games according to age group, reinforcing issues such as ethics and differentiation by showing the differences between the two types of environment: the real and the virtual for the child. (Duda)

But it is also vague in terms of the use of digital games in teaching, adopting a rather prescriptive stance towards digital gaming itself.

The above tendency did not seem to diminish after we moved to the group discussions on Steam. In the discussion forum entitled "Teacher Education", we started by asking about how to deal with unpredictability in the classroom, taking into account that, even when being familiar with certain game genres, we still have to make impromptu decisions when facing unpredictable situations. One of the participants came up with an interesting answer:

> [...] After all, we are dealing with humans, anything can happen during the lesson, unforeseen events, opportunities to go deeper into other discussions working on critique... I believe that there is no universal approach or strategy that

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> will work in all classes. We as teachers have to be prepared to deal with this in class, because unlike games we don't have a checkpoint or a restart in the classroom haha (Taru Sensei, 27 May 2020).

This may have been the comment that most explicitly connected game play with the task of teaching without reducing it to an instrumental process. By stating that "anything can happen during the lesson, unforeseen events, opportunities to go deeper into other discussions working on critique", Taru brings to the fore the possibility of putting into practice a performative ethics. However, other comments kept the instrumental tone and vague proposals. In the following statement, adopting a digital gaming approach to classroom, with no further elaboration, would be enough to guarantee some degree of innovation:

> I believe that the teacher has to be always updated. Through games, the teacher can end up attracting the attention of a large part of the class, letting go of the standard conventional classes. (Mortte, 1 July 2020)

So, our next step was to try to also connect their life experiences with the whole ensemble:

> *Guys, in some comments on the discussions here on Steam it was clear that you relate real life with the gaming world, which is very interesting! So, as future teachers, how do you think about using this relationship in the classroom? And what specifically from games could be used in the classroom?*
>
> The teacher could choose a game related to the lesson's theme, tell a little about the characters and the objectives of the game, choose a specific scene from the game and show it on the overhead projector, without showing the complete unfolding of the scene, generating a certain suspense. From there the teacher asks for students' opinions and starts a kind of debate about what the character could do, the environment, etc. The game scene and the debate would be like a preparation to start a new subject, and at the end of the class the teacher releases the continuation of the scene or a new scene to leave the students thinking for the next class. (klevertoncad, 7 July 2020)
>
> We can learn several things about various areas of knowledge with the games, in addition the games stimulate us and make us feel various emotions with the various situations that they create. I think that using these situations to teach enriches the process, making it more meaningful for those who identify themselves with the games, their worlds and their narratives. (JhinVilL, 7 July 2020)
>
> The persistence about beating a stage of some game will be brought to the classroom along with me. Also, just like in strategy games, I will try every possible way to teach until everything is well established about the content – sometimes even encouraging the playing of some of the biggest games that helped me learn, in this case English – like Pokémon Sapphire for the GBA. (B.S., July 7, 2020)

Once again, the comments presented vague proposals or skipped the main issue to some extent. Since the research team had requested "specific" examples of the use of digital games in teaching, klevertoncad gave a more detailed account of what he might do on such occasion. Even so, I consider his comment to fall within the category of a descriptive ethics, mainly aiming at describing processes and trying to establish what's right and what's wrong. On the other hand, JhinVil was rather vague about his proposal, although it is also a good example of what Simkins and Steinkuehler (2008) call affect in digital gaming. B.S. proposed to borrow from games a feature that looks positivist when applied to education, i.e. the idea that classroom contents can be taught in a thoroughly successful way. Besides, he also resorts to an instrumental use of games for learning a subject (English).

Finally, we insisted on the idea of impromptu decisions in the game and in the classroom:

> *As a player, you are surprised by some situation that threatens to take away your control during the game, how would you resolve this condition? In a similar classroom scenario, how would you handle this situation?*

Only three participants posted their comments for this, but all of them tended to present solutions based on the imposition of discipline, whether connected with video game situations or not. Such an attitude is in line with the characteristics of a normative ethics. It can also be classified as closed rhetorics (KALANTZIS; COPE, 2020) and seems to reflect what happens in closed ethical games, according to Sicart (2009).

Interestingly, one of the most situated comments came from a different discussion, not directly related to teacher education. When we asked, in the discussion forum Ethics and the Player's Behavior, *What kind of conduct do you consider wrong/unacceptable for a player in the game environment?* Taru Sensei commented:

> […the game] was full of players with this behaviour of wanting to get in the way of weaker players just because they can. It made me reflect a lot about what Paulo Freire said about the dream of the oppressed being that of becoming the oppressor. Many players have this behaviour because it's an environment where they can be the oppressors just because they are protected by another "identity" in the game. (12 May 2020)

Although this comment is not directly connected with the (English) classroom, it rests well in the educational field, since Taru seeks to apply one of Paulo Freire's most notable principles, that of the oppressed's desire to become the oppressor through access to power.

I would like to conclude this analysis by bringing up some data about the players' experiences with *Life is Strange*. Mathie (24 June 2020) mentioned that "playing this game having anxiety, or even depression, must be really hard, because you really feel like you've killed someone if you make a bad decision". JhinVilL (24 June 2020) emphasizes this link with real life: "we can even

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draw parallels with real situations that have happened to acquaintances and people close to us". However, on another occasion, he stated:

> Precisely because it is a virtual environment we feel "safe" to do things we could not or would never do in real life, the limit of this is the game itself and what we can do in it. In Life is Strange, for example, it's very easy to make decisions that we wouldn't make in real life just to "see what happens". After all, it's just a game. (7 July 2020)

There seems to be some kind of contradiction in his words. Although, at first, he manages to see a link between the game's narrative and real life, he later dismisses that possibility by resorting to the well known this-is-just-a-game rationale.

Taru Sensei, on the other hand, resorted to another game, from the same genre, to illustrate how these games can have an impact on players' lives:

> [In] another game I played recently, Detroit: Become Human, I felt the moral and ethical weight of every decision I made [...] My gameplay was very immersive and I remember caring a lot about Alice's mental and physical health. Even though she was an NPC in a game, I cared for her as if she were my real daughter. I ended up not finishing the game [...] and I don't feel like playing it again. (Taru Sensei, 12 May 2020)

These final comments give us a good idea about how the experience with this kind of genre may involve affect (SIMKINS; STEINKUEHLER, 2008).

V. Conclusion

I started this paper by proposing an interconnection among ethics, digital games and teacher education to examine how undergraduate students and would-be English language teachers connect the decision making process in digital games with real life and classroom situations, especially when involving ethical issues. The point of departure was the idea that – similarly to what happens in digital gaming – impromptu situations in the classroom tend to involve instant decisions, not previously provided for in the lesson plan.

With regard to the three environments mentioned above (game, real life, classroom), it can be seen that the participants in this research did not have many problems in making the connections between the first two, especially when it comes to making moral and/or ethical decisions. However, when it comes to the classroom, the difficulties are quite apparent. Part of the difficulty may lie in the teacher education process itself, which tends to privilege working with fixed and planned structures, alien to the dynamism of the real classroom (MENEZES DE SOUZA, 2011; ZACCHI, 2015).

Another possible source of problems is an old acquaintance. Working with digital games in the classroom can be seen as just another way of using non-verbal texts to support work on linguistic elements, e.g. grammar, vocabulary, verbal skills. Similar approaches have been used in the past with other non-verbal resources such as songs, videos and cartoons. However, nowadays this problem is augmented by the myriad of digital resources available in young people's everyday lives.

Taking into account the three types of ethics presented at the beginning of this paper, I would like to propose their application in the context of the classroom, mainly in relation to the performance of teachers and based on a scenario in which complex dilemmas arise during their practice. In this way, normative ethics refers to a posture that tries to impose on students what is right and what is wrong, in a monological discourse that does not allow for contestation. Descriptive ethics also has as its principle the choice between right and wrong, not in an imposing sense, but only in an explanatory one. Performative ethics, finally, arises when the dilemma, making its appearance in the classroom, is taken by the teacher as a starting point for discussions and/or activities around the possible themes related to it. The teacher, in this case, takes the opportunity to make the students reflect critically on the issue and make their own decisions. While the first and the second ones can be defined as closed rhetoric, the latter fits well within open rhetoric (KALANTZIS; COPE, 2020).

Before ending, I would like to make a quick comparison between two participants, Taru Sensei and B.S. The first one stood out for having managed to cross, even if timidly, the borders mentioned in the above paragraphs by perceiving possible points of contact between the digital game environment and the classroom, but not as a mere application of techniques. This positioning is perceptible in comments such as "unlike games we don't have a checkpoint or a restart in the classroom", and when he compares the behaviour of some players to "what Paulo Freire said about the dream of the oppressed being that of becoming the oppressor".

B.S., on the other hand, tended to bring to the discussion preconceived ideas about what he considers to be the roles of teachers in general. In a sense, they were decontextualized regarding the possible uses of digital games as classroom resources. In statements like "transposing the refusal to give up on winning the game into real life", "The persistence about beating a stage of some game will be brought to the classroom along with me" and "it is not only the student who is there to learn, in fact each and every person is always learning until the day they die", one gets the impression that he is speaking more out of his own conviction than as a result of a critical evaluation developed in his educational process and which could also be applied in several other situations.

What these data suggest in terms of teacher education is the need to invest mainly in two fronts: a) prepare future teachers to work with digital media and

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multimodal texts so as not to make them mere supports for linguistic contents; b) give less emphasis on a competence-based education, privileging the fluidity and dynamics of the different classroom contexts. This implies an approach which takes into account performative processes, constructed in the everyday life of the classroom, with all its unpredictability. Decision-making, in this case, goes far beyond a normative and a descriptive ethics, making room for a more performative one. Bringing back the possible courses of action which I presented in the introduction, ignoring unexpected situations or merely lecturing students about the issues raised by them will not be enough for fostering critical reflection. For performative ethics to take place in the classroom, the teacher will have to integrate these issues into classroom practice in a number of different ways, and not by just proposing open discussions about them.

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