Chapter 12
Honing Emotional Intelligence with Game-Based Crucible Experiences

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ABSTRACT

The focus of the present paper is the design of multi-player role-playing game instances as crucible experiences for the exploration of one's emotional intelligence. Subsequent sections describe the design of game-based, intercultural crucible experiences and how this design was employed for training with members of the United States Marine Corps (USMC). This work with the USMC is presented as a case study and example of the use of crucible experiences in game-based learning. Crucible experiences are learning opportunities relevant across a number of different domains and disciplines such as education, healthcare, corporate training, diplomacy, crisis management, international business, and intercultural communication. The present paper demonstrates that crucible experiences are catalysts for personal growth and can be incorporated into game-based learning design whose intent is to create defining moments in which learners can explore emotional intelligence and examine who they are under challenging conditions.

INTRODUCTION

Good games do not simulate physical reality; they mirror emotional reality. -Chris Crawford (2003, p. 31)

The study of game-based learning has grown steadily over the past several years and future growth can be expected as the use of serious games for education and training gains momentum and becomes more mainstream. Serious games

can be defined as the use of interactive digital technologies for training and education in private, public, government, and military sectors (Raybourn, 2007). For example, serious games include games and simulations for exploring interpersonal development, diplomacy, governance, health, education, management, and leadership. Game-based learning is defined in the present paper as an area of inquiry within serious games focused on the application of theories, methodologies, technologies, and design to understand, explain, and improve the interaction among learning outcomes, experience, and motivation in video game-based education and training.

While there are many definitions for game, most identify some sort of conflict, rules, structure, goals, and uncertain outcomes as salient game elements (Malone, 1980; Crawford, 2003; Aldrich, 2004; Salen & Zimmerman, 2004; Bjork & Holopainen, 2004). Salen and Zimmerman (2004) define game play as the formal interaction that ensues when players follow rules and structures that have been designed to result in an experience. These experiences are often identified as being emotionally engaging (Fullerton et al., 2004) although as David Freeman (2004, p. 10) so succinctly stated, "you can't just suggest an emotion and assume the player will feel it." Creating true affect in games requires satisfying learners' emotional needs or presenting different opportunities to explore emotions that learners may find appealing to try (Malone, 1982). This exploration is often accomplished through storytelling. If good games are to mirror emotional reality they must take learners on a journey through narrative and storytelling experience (Wells, 1998; Miller, 2008; Crawford, 2005) with dramatic moments (crucibles) in which learners demonstrate how they feel, how they think, and how they act.

Role-playing games often utilize rich narrative structures to immerse learners in a challenge by engaging their self-esteem, emotions, and curiosity (Malone, 1980). Since emotions and actions are so intrinsically linked in life, role-playing presents a unique opportunity to safely challenge learners to hone emotional intelligence in interactive scenarios that are also crucible experiences. Whether role-playing occurs in a single- or multiplayer game the genre's emphasis on character development and social interaction is a natural fit for game-based learning to hone one's emotional intelligence and mental agility.

Emotional intelligence has been defined by Salovey and Mayer as "the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (1990, p. 189). Emotional intelligence is therefore the degree to which individuals attend to, manage, and use emotions to reason about, or enhance reasoning, in order to potentially benefit one and others (Mayer et al., 2008). These abilities intersect with general cognitive intelligence and enhance adaptive functions in perception, thought, analysis, and emotion management (Mayer et al., 2004). Salovey and Mayer (1990) argued that emotion-relevant stimuli and sophisticated affective information may be processed differently from cognitive information and that individuals also differ in their ability to do so. Honing one's emotional intelligence is a critical skill of social intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, intercultural communication competence, and general emotional and intellectual growth. For example, identifying and understanding one's emotional responses to cultural differences are important developmental skills in intercultural communication that can facilitate work toward self-awareness (Bennett, 1986; Stewart & Bennett, 1991). Another example of growth is reflecting and regulating one's emotions to develop coping strategies for dealing with a traumatic event.

An important element of a game-based learning approach to hone the development of emotional intelligence for abilities such as intercultural com-

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