Promoting cross-cultural awareness through exposure in game-based learning

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Introduction

With the global market constantly evolving through a globe-spanning network of communications, collaborations and immigrations, individuals are encouraged to be equipped with cultural literacy [1]. To offset cultural division, it is essential to promote "*cross-fertilisation across all boundaries, between 'majority' and 'minorities', 'dominant' and 'sub' cultures, localities, classes, faiths, disciplines and genres, as the source of cultural, social, civic and economic innovation*" [2]. Three main campaigns are:

- **Pluralism,** which aims to promote positive diversity by encouraging understanding and respect [3]. Britain, for instance, has increasingly diversified in ethnic and religious terms as a result of continued large scale immigration from a far wider set of source countries.
- **Homogenisation,** that goes beyond co-existence through tolerance by promoting one common identity based around citizenship and assimilating minorities into the society. Malaysia, for instance, is running '1Malaysia' campaign [4] to promote homogenisation while celebrating diversity.
- **Globalisation:** Awareness nurtured at the root level can be extended into a more global setting. The lack of cross-cultural awareness can be detrimental to the success of global marketing campaigns, business meetings and international relations.

Within the domain of game-based learning (GBL), this article briefly describes the attributes of the e-VITA project [5], which may be adopted by future initiatives in exploring games to support cross-cultural awareness campaigns, such as '1Malaysia' and multicultural Britain.

Learning Framework

With the advancement of game technology, individuals can practice behaviours in role-play situations within a 'safe' environment for rule learning, acclimatisation and repetition of tasks [6][7][8].

Under the e-VITA project, a set of games has been developed to promote European cultural awareness by conveying cross-border and inter-generational experiences. Aspects of Europe's socio-cultural past can be experienced in an interactive and engaging way. The four key learning parameters [9] that influence the design of e-VITA games are:

- **Context:** The key aim is adaptability in culturally-diversified conditions. The two objectives are to achieve adaptability in cross-cultural communication (verbal, non-verbal) and socio-behaviour (conscious/unconscious actions, reactions and habits). Based on the e-VITA project, cross-border and cross-cultural experiences of senior Europeans are to be conveyed to the younger generations.
- **Learner:** In accordance with the learning context, the different cultures, ethnicities and generations play key roles in the game content. Learner-centric

and personalised approach is essential to ensure that the GBL will address the issues localised to the individual countries.

- **Representation:** The content should foster an attitude of acceptance and respect for the unique cultures. The strategy is to combat biases, anxieties and stereotypes through a series of scenarios that provoke interest, emotion, and insight. Content should also preserve own set of values instead of only developing empathy and tolerance. The design attributes are thus to motivate, expose and to provide insight, which advocate experiential and narrative-based learning [10]. Life is perceived through others' eyes and a story of an experience is represented in diverse ways. In the e-VITA project, game scenarios are based on personal experiences of the older generation (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Screenshot from the e-VITA game prototype

- **Pedagogy:** To provide an engaging GBL experience, the e-VITA games incorporate four learning approaches:
  i. **Narrative-centric**, which emphasises the use of storytelling to achieve immersion, drawing on oral history [11] pedagogy.
  ii. **Experiential** [10], in which the learner is transplanted into the situations faced by the storyteller, drawing heavily on situative [12] pedagogy.
  iii. **Puzzle-based**, where the emphasis is strongly on providing effective puzzles and challenges for the learner, with the story and narrative taking a less direct role.
  iv. **Exploratory**[12], focusing on ongoing learners' development, in accordance with Vygotskyan [13] theory, by directing them to external resources in the context of challenges or problems presented by the games.

Conclusions

The motivation of using GBL is thus to gain insight through an engaging platform that exposes learners to culturally-diversified scenarios. The benefits include:

- Safe environment for exposure-based learning

- Narratives that elicit emotional involvement
- Fun and engaging activities
- Awareness and insights into oneself and others
- Translation of insight into daily lives

Future works include adopting this framework towards the development of a learning environment to supports campaigns, such as '1Malaysia' and multicultural Britain. Awareness nurtured at the root level can be extended to a more global reach.

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