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'Papers, Please' – Using a Video Game to explore Experiential Learning and Authentic Assessment in Immigration and Asylum Law

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Abstract

This paper presents a case-study of the author's efforts to align Lucas Pope's 2013 video game, 'Papers, Please,' with teaching, learning, and assessment strategy on the Immigration, Refugee & Citizenship Law module at TU Dublin. The author secured funding from TU Dublin IMPACT to purchase the game for the 37 students enrolled on the module in the 2020-2021 academic year. Students played the game over a five-week period, during which time they submitted reflective blog posts on their experience of the game. A more substantive written assignment followed thereafter, in which students elaborated upon their reflections with reference to the relevant scholarship and lecture materials. Following debriefing, marking, and feedback, the author evaluated this assessment strategy with reference to the students' blog posts, their assignment submissions, and their responses to a semi-structured survey. What emerges from the data is an overwhelmingly positive response to games-based learning as a means to facilitate active, experiential learning and accommodate alternative learning styles. Role-playing as an immigration officer allowed students to apply the law in practice, and supported higher levels of cognition and knowledge retention. While the limitations of the data are noted herein, this case-study affirms the potential of video games as a supplementary resource, and the extent to which video games can be constructively aligned with course syllabi.

Keywords: games-based learning; video games; assessment; asylum; experiential learning.

Introduction

Video games have never been so popular. Some 2.69 billion people around the world are “gamers” (Statista, 2021), enabled by the variety of devices across which individuals can access their favourite game. 50% of the European population aged between 6 and 64 were playing video games in 2021 (Interactive Software Federation of Europe, 2021), while the British gaming population grew by 63% during the lockdowns necessitated by Covid-19 (Opinium, 2020). Video games played a positive role in supporting gamers’ mental well-being during this time, providing an enjoyable means of maintaining social contact and a virtual escape from the stresses and doldrums of lockdown (Barr & Copeland-Stewart, 2021; Johannes et al., 2021). These contemporary studies affirm prior research on the effects of video games on cognition and social and environmental adaptability, defined broadly as the manner in which an individual interprets and responds to different situations (Toh & Kirschner, 2020; Barr, 2018, 2017).

Academic interest in video games has similarly found the mainstream in recent years. Game-based learning frameworks have evolved beyond the gamification of traditional learning activities to embrace commercial and ‘serious’ video games as a distinct form of experiential learning. Another body of work views video games through the critical lenses that they offer, drawing links between situational gameplay and the relevant scholarship (Bosman, 2019; Sou, 2018; Hayden, 2017; Orme, 2017; Moffett et al., 2017; Newbery-Jones, 2016; Shaw, 2015; Heron & Belford, 2014). One game that has been subject to both lines of inquiry is Lucas Pope’s ‘Papers, Please’ (3909 LLC, 2013).

In ‘Papers, Please’ (PP), players take on the role of a lowly administrator who is posted at the border crossing to the fictional country of Arstotzka. The player is charged with reviewing the immigration papers of job-seekers, holiday-makers, refugees, and smugglers; and regulating their entry based on the legitimacy of their documentation. This decision often involves a moral judgment: doing one’s job ‘correctly’ and earning enough money to support your in-game family, or discarding mounting rules and regulations in favour of empathy and compassion. PP thus confronts players with many of the complex issues that characterise border control, including dehumanisation, securitization, the right to asylum, and the right to fair procedures (Chin & Golding, 2016; Formosa et al., 2016).

This paper presents a case-study of the author's efforts to embed PP in a University module on Immigration and Asylum Law at a time when teaching was taking place entirely online owing to the Covid-19 pandemic. The paper begins with a literature review of the educational benefits of video games and the associated terminology. The paper then offers a brief introduction to PP's gameplay loop, and the pedagogical implications of the game's themes and mechanics. The paper proceeds to set out the assessment design underpinning this case-study: reflective blog-posts that detailed the students' experience of the game each week, followed by a more substantive written assignment in which students had to support and elaborate upon their reflections with reference to the relevant scholarship and lecture materials. In the penultimate section, the author evaluates this assessment strategy with reference to the students' blog posts, their assignment submissions, and their responses to a semi-structured survey. What emerges from the data is a positive response to PP as an engaging resource, a vehicle for active and experiential learning, a powerful call to reflection, and a means of accommodating a greater variety of learning styles. Lessons learned from the experience and the implications for future practice are considered in the concluding section.

Video Games as Educational Resources

A number of terms apply to the use of video games in education, many of which are used interchangeably – for example; 'game-based learning,' 'edutainment,' 'serious games,' and 'educational games.' Martí-Parreño et al.'s (2016) analysis notes that game-based learning (GBL) is the most commonly used term, referring generally to the use of existing games in educational contexts. Some GBL frameworks recommend the bespoke design of digital games tailored to a specific context (Newbery-Jones, 2016), while others advocate student-driven design as a form of learning in and of itself. However, the use of existing commercial video games in educational settings finds strong support in the literature (Van Eck, 2006). Indeed the models of instructional design often encountered in commercial video games tend to reflect good pedagogical theory. Becker (2009), for example, notes the link between successful commercial video games and Gagné et al.'s (1992) nine events of instruction. Laamarti et al (2014) summarise these events as follows:

- (1) Gain attention.
- (2) Inform learners of the objective.
- (3) Stimulate recall of prior learning.

- (4) Present stimulus material.
- (5) Provide learning guidance.
- (6) Elicit performance.
- (7) Provide feedback.
- (8) Assess performance.
- (9) Enhance retention and transfer.

Commercial video games are worth considering for another significant reason: “these are products expertly crafted to engage and entertain” (Barr, 2018, p. 293). Commercial video games boast significant budgets; scripted voice-acting; branching narratives; and multiple endings dictated by the player’s actions. Gameplay mechanics such as multiple dialogue options or branching narratives can directly involve players in the direction of the story; implicate them in the ethical and moral questions at the heart of gameplay; and imbue them with a sense of jeopardy and accountability (Ferchaud & Beth Oliver, 2019; Newbery-Jones, 2016; Green & Jenkins, 2014). These mechanics bridge the distance between the player and the in-game world in a manner that is unrivalled by traditional media (Ferchaud & Beth Oliver, 2019; Heron & Belford, 2014).

Not only are these narratives devices entertaining; they trigger higher cognitive processes and pedagogical benefits of their own (Toh & Kirschner, 2020; Newbery-Jones, 2016). Green and Jenkins (2014) note that interactive narratives are more likely to induce counterfactual thinking in the player. This counterfactual thinking manifests as player-driven reflection on whether an in-game situation could have been handled differently, or whether the action the player chose was the right one, etc. (Exmeyer & Boden, 2020; Formosa et al., 2016).

Games that require players to assume or inhabit certain identities have also been shown to promote perspective-taking of other groups’ experiences (Peña & Hernández Pérez, 2020; McKernan, 2019). Even though players are fully aware that people within the game are not real, studies have found that players will still treat them as social entities worthy of moral concern (Ferchaud & Beth Oliver, 2019; Sarian, 2019; Hartmann & Vorderer, 2010). Katsarov et al. (2019) reviewed a number of commercial video games to identify the gameplay mechanisms that trigger such moral sensitivity in players. They identified 20 such mechanisms, some of which include:

- Placing the player in the role of an individual responsible for unethical behaviour;
- Confronting the player with an ethical dilemma, the only response to which is to choose the 'lesser evil' of a series of imperfect options;
- Confronting the player with information from the real world that compares to/contrasts with their in-game behaviour;
- Contrasting the player's decisions with other players' decisions, thereby encouraging them to reflect on their decisions (Katsarov et al., 2019).

Katsarov et al. (2019, p. 361) suggest using these mechanisms in combination so as to optimally develop moral sensitivity. Many of the mechanisms listed above are present in 'Papers, Please,' and manifested themselves in the case-study documented below.

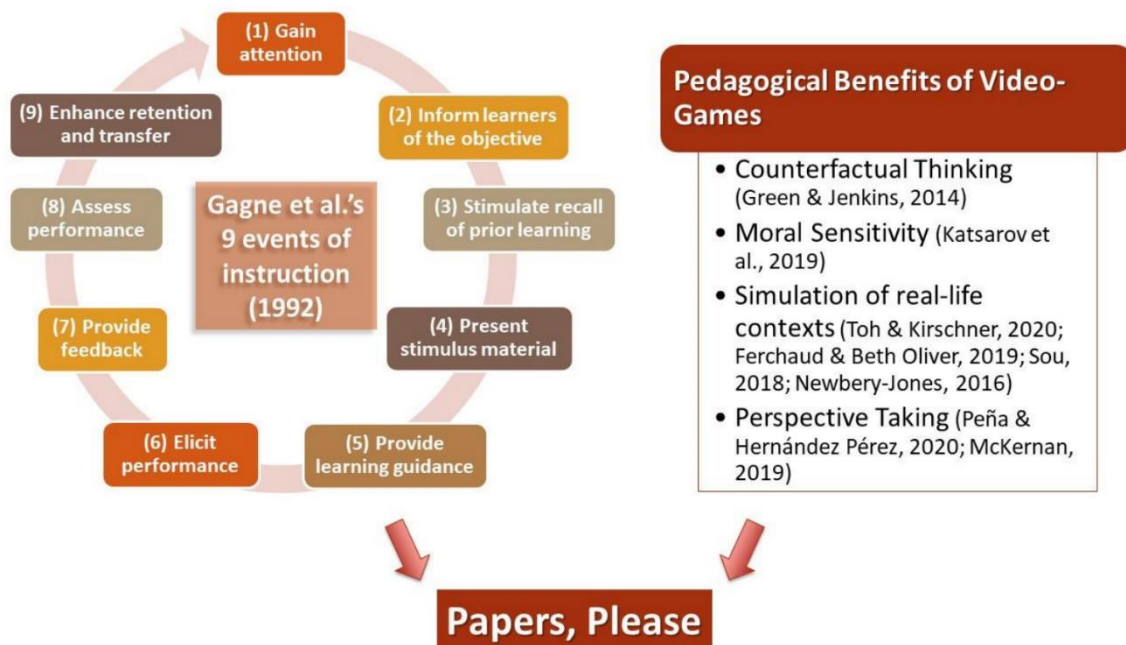


Figure 1: instructional design, video games and *Papers, Please*

However, the educational benefits of video games go beyond the virtual world. Several studies have found a link between video games and communication skills (Alonso-Díaz et al., 2019; Barr, 2018), while others have noted the potential of video games to develop 'graduate attributes,' or transferable skills that are applicable in workplace environments (Barr, 2017; Parong et al., 2017; Newbery-Jones, 2016; Susi et al., 2007; Michael & Chen, 2006). Video games offer a safe space in which students can apply the theoretical aspects of their education in a practical environment that allows them to experiment and fail without consequences (Toh

& Kirschner, 2020; Ferchaud & Beth Oliver, 2019; Newbery-Jones, 2016). Video games also allow students to experience simulations of real-life contexts that would otherwise be impractical for reasons of cost, ethics, or safety (Susi et al., 2007). For example, Moffett et al. (2017) used the military tactical shooter, Arma 3, to role-play the application of the laws of war with third-level students. The simulation served as a powerful means of emphasising the devastating impact of war, while minimising the ‘voyeurism’ that often accompanies mainstream media coverage of conflict (2017, p. 503). Sou (2018, p. 520) similarly notes the voyeuristic, simplistic, and linear representation of refugees in mainstream media, and points to the potential of video games to offer a more ‘holistic contextualisation’.

Games that are used to explore or prepare for such realistic settings often attract the label of ‘serious games.’ There is broad agreement among the literature that serious games are those used for a purpose other than mere entertainment (Susi et al., 2007; Corti, 2006; Michael & Chen, 2006): it is the addition of teaching and learning activities that makes them ‘serious’ (Zyda, 2005). Susi et al. (2007) argue that a serious game is one that contributes to the achievement of a defined purpose, whether or not the user – or indeed the game designer – is aware of that purpose. By this definition, a commercial title such as ‘Papers, Please’ can be described as a ‘serious game.’

‘Papers, Please’

‘Papers, Please’ is a ‘low-fidelity simulation’ (Exmeyer & Boden, 2020, p. 413) that places the player in the role of an immigration officer at the border to the fictional authoritarian state of Arstotzka in 1982. In this role, players encounter the variety of travellers that make up global migration flows: nationals seeking the right of return/the right to enter; family members seeking reunification; asylum-seekers; economic migrants, and others. Players are tasked with reviewing the documentation of would-be entrants and noting any discrepancies between their paper-work and the entry requirements set by the Ministry of Admission. Players can admit those who have a right to enter Arstotzka and refuse those who do not, and are given in-game “credits” for every traveller who is processed correctly. Where the player admits an individual without the appropriate permissions, they are docked credits. Alternatively, players can accept bribes from certain travellers to overlook documentary discrepancies, though this comes with risks of its own. Credits are important in ‘Papers, Please,’ as players have an in-game family that can face destitution, starvation, or illness if the player cannot balance their finances. While entry requirements are relatively easy to follow at

the outset, the player faces mounting procedural standards as the game progresses, coming under increasing pressure to detain, x-ray, and even shoot certain migrants. The game can end with any one of 20 endings, which are dictated by the player's choices over the course of the game: the immigration officer can be imprisoned; can lose their job; can engage in treason against the State, flee from it as an asylumseeker, or uphold the bureaucratic order loyally. Notably, the game's ending arises as an aggregation of many small choices, rather than a product of one or two critical junctures that are signposted to the player. This reflects a more nuanced portrayal of morality that leaves it entirely to the player to reconcile their actions with their conscience (Formosa et al., 2016).

The core gameplay loop of PP thus consists of repetitive tasks that present the drudgery of work as 'play' (Kelly, 2018; Orme, 2017; Johnson, 2015): players shuffle through paperwork, rubber stamp it, and try to avoid making mistakes. This may not be the ideal form of escapism after a day in the office or the lecture hall. However, these mundane experiences are often characteristic of 'serious games' that seek to communicate a message about an issue (Wilson et al., 2017). Despite Pope's intention to keep 'the highly political topic as unpolitical as possible' (Costantini, 2013), the gameplay loop at the heart of PP does say something about immigration and border control. To progress, players must adopt a mechanised mind-set and adapt 'to the tedious minutia of bureaucratic logistics' (Kelly, 2018, p. 471). Too many acts of clemency and the player may face a premature "game over" screen. Over time, the threat of official sanction coerces players into following established bureaucratic practices, and neglecting any appeals to humanitarian or compassionate concern. Players thus undergo a cognitive shift – a process of subjectivity formation that moulds them to the logical and rational requirements of the job (Kelly, 2018; Morrissette, 2017). Through the boredom or banality of its gameplay loop, PP is saying something about concepts and processes that we may otherwise take for granted (Peña et al., 2018; Sou, 2018; Orme, 2017): the role of individual discretion in matters of migration, the extent to which individuals are bound by immigration and asylum law, and the effects of these laws on the individuals who cross borders. Bogost (2007) uses the term 'procedural rhetoric' to describe this unique means of conveying a message about real-world systems through the gamification of the processes that comprise it. Instead of communicating its message in an explicit or definite manner, procedural rhetoric requires players to disassemble the processes presented in-game, reflect on their actions, and come to their own conclusions (Peña & Hernández Pérez, 2020; Sou, 2018).

PP is thus an ideal game for use in a third-level module on Immigration and Asylum Law. As a commercial title, it benefits from the engaging and entertaining features that are common in mainstream video games: decisions carrying moral and emotional weight, and an interactive narrative that provokes reflection as to why one action was taken over another. Beyond its gameplay, PP offers a simulated model of a system of immigration that mirrors our own, and offers a critical lens through which we can view the lived experiences of those who interact with it. In this regard, it qualifies as a serious game, despite Pope's intention to merely provide 'an entertaining experience for a few hours' (Webster, 2013).

The Teaching and Learning Context

The focus of this case study is *Immigration, Refugee & Citizenship Law*, a 10 ECTS credit elective module for students on the Bachelor of Law programme at TU Dublin. The module seeks to empower critical thinkers, problem solvers, collaborators, and global citizens by exploring questions such as 'why do physical and procedural barriers continue to appear in a time defined by mass movement?' and 'why is there a difference between the rights enshrined internationally and the experience of migrants nationally?' Teaching and learning activities on the module include problem-based learning; peer to peer discussion in small groups; and active viewing of video resources drawn from popular and social media. The module is typically assessed over a single academic year, with assessment methods usually comprising a critical essay carrying 40% of the grade and an end-of-year examination carrying the remaining 60%.

Unfortunately, modularised courses fitting this mould do not provide the optimal framework for deep learning processes (Jessop et al., 2014; Donnelly & Fitzmaurice, 2005). Two assessment events are unlikely to encourage the cycles of continuous reflection necessary to shape global citizens concerned about issues of asylum, migration, and integration; or the problem solvers necessary to address these issues. Instead, they encourage students to view assessment functionally, and to adopt learning strategies sufficient to meet the minimum assessment requirements (Biggs & Tang, 2011). This instrumental view of assessment inhibits active learning, and is symptomatic of a module that is not constructively aligned (Biggs, 1999). This case-study sought to address these shortcomings by utilising an engaging and emotive resource for assessment: the critically acclaimed video-game, 'Papers, Please.' Innovation in assessment has been shown to effect a change in students' learning processes

(Zhao et al., 2017), and similar results were expected of this intervention. The prolonged pivot to online teaching necessitated Covid-19 further highlighted the potential of video games as educational resources that were remotely accessible at a time when contact teaching and educational stimuli were severely restricted. This case-study thus presents an evaluation of an experimental, innovative approach to legal education at a time when circumstances demanded it. PP facilitates Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle by allowing players to experience the real-world policies that comprise immigration law: state sovereignty, securitization of borders, the right to asylum, representations of migrants in the media. The game's branching narratives also trigger the reflective component of Kolb's cycle, by prompting the player to consider 'the reason why one action was taken over another and how the structure of a particular game influences which actions are considered right or wrong within a given context' (Exmeyer & Boden, 2020, p. 413; Sou, 2018). Viewed in this manner, a topically relevant game like PP thus becomes a means to constructively align active learning processes and assessment strategies on the Immigration, Refugee & Citizenship Law module. To embed PP in the module, funding was secured from TU Dublin's IMPACT project (2021). This case-study was awarded seed funding as a prototype project that would enhance teaching and learning in the short-term and lead to transferable innovations going forward. In anticipation of a GBL approach to assessment, students were asked to play the choose-your-own-adventure game, 'Syrian Journey' (BBC, 2015) in October 2020. This short, text-based game puts players in the shoes of a refugee fleeing the Syrian civil war, and highlights issues such as border control, human trafficking, and the impact of gender. Students were asked to reflect on the choices they made over the course of the game, and to post their experience to the discussion board on TU Dublin's virtual learning environment, Brightspace. This laid the groundwork for the journaling exercises students would have to complete when playing PP – a longer video-game with more sophisticated gameplay and narrative mechanics.

In February 2021, IMPACT funding was used to purchase PP for the 37 students on the module at a cost of €8.99 per game. Students were invited to create personal accounts on the digital game distribution service, Steam, and the game was then 'gifted' to these accounts by the author. Gifting the game through Steam allowed students to freely and remotely access the game according to the requirements of their respective devices (Windows, Mac, mobile, tablet, etc.). Students had a five week period in which to play the game, after which they had to complete an assessment based on the game. In order to align PP with assessment, the 40% previously attributed to a written assignment was re-distributed. 10% was afforded to weekly

blog posts in which students had to detail their time with ‘Papers, Please.’ These posts could include general comments on technical/accessibility issues, or personal comments on students’ enjoyment of the game. Students were also prompted to consider any linkages between the game and supplementary materials. Private blogs were set up on Brightspace, and were only visible to the lecturer. Informal feedback was provided by the lecturer in advance of a more substantive written assignment based on the game. This substantive assignment, ‘the final reflection,’ carried the remaining 30% of the continuous assessment grade. In contrast to the blog posts, the final reflection required students to critique PP as a distinct audio-visual medium, and to draw out the comparisons between the game and their learning on the module. Students were offered reflective prompts to guide their submissions in this regard, including:

- How has your experience of PP reflected the legal instruments and principles that we’ve covered over the course of this module?
- Does this game communicate aspects of immigration and asylum law that legal study does not/cannot?
- Can you draw any linkages between the recommended reading materials and the situations you have encountered in the game?

Following marking and feedback, students were invited to complete a semi-structured survey on their experience of the assignment. Of the 37 students who participated in the assignment, only 18 completed the survey (49%). One possible explanation for this low-response rate is the pivot to online teaching throughout the academic year 2020-2021 and the provision of an online feedback form, which often comes at the cost of reduced response rates and the risk of non-response bias (Standish et al., 2018). With these limitations in mind, this paper will now proceed to explore some of the dominant themes that emerge from the students’ blog posts, their assignment submissions, and their feedback forms. Data was drawn from the students’ blog posts and assignment submissions several months after marking and feedback had taken place. Responses that related to the themes identified in the literature on games-based learning and pedagogy were collated in a single document, and categorised under headings pertaining to the dominant themes that emerged. To protect student privacy, their responses were anonymised. The 37 students assessed were coded like so: A1 – A9, B1 – B9, C1- C9, D1 – D9, and E1. That is how they appear in the analysis that follows

Feedback and Evaluation

The Student Experience

The students' experience of GBL was overwhelmingly positive (see Fig. 1 and 2). In their reflections, students praised PP as “enjoyable”, “interesting” and engaging (A3, A6, D2, D4), and a “positive aspect of remote learning” (B6). Students noted that the low-fidelity simulation offered a unique perspective that could not be gleaned within the classroom (A2, A3, A8, B4, B6, C4, C9). While students themselves noted that playing this game was not the same as knowing “exactly how [migrants] live and feel” (D5), emotional responses to the game were common:

It was genuinely quite saddening to play through Papers, Please, and see our own world reflected back at me... I had my doubts on the efficacy of the medium in a teaching environment, but I was blown away. It seemed that, unlike the many other essay questions I have done throughout my years in education, the message stuck with me (C2).

These observations suggest that students' learning activities and the aims of the *Immigration, Asylum & Citizenship Law* module were constructively aligned during the assignment: students were engaging with the key questions at the heart of the module as critical thinkers.

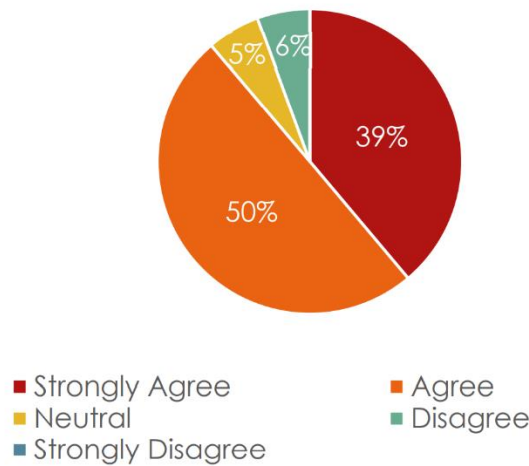


Figure 2: responses to *I enjoyed my time with the video game 'Papers, Please'*

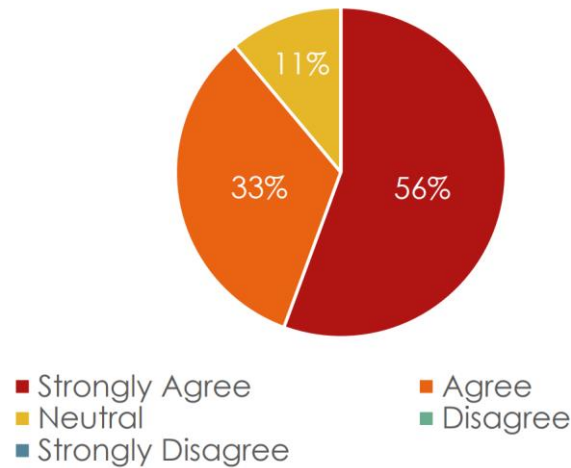


Figure 3: responses to *Subject to the improvements I might list below, I would enjoy more game-based assessments like this one*

Active Learning

Learning materials were similarly aligned with this particular form of assessment. Students described the game as a form of active learning that pushed them to recall prior learning and engage further with recommended and supplementary readings (D2, anonymous feedback). Links were drawn between the game and assigned readings such as Dauvergne (2004) on securitization as an expression of state sovereignty; Ariel and Vaidehi (2017) on media representations of migrants; and FitzGerald (2019) on procedural barriers to immigration as a form of ‘remote control’. Students also offered interesting original insights of their own as a response to the video-game and other assigned resources. Some linked the game to policies covered in class, such as US President Donald Trump’s 2017 ‘Muslim Ban’ (A5, C6), the EU’s externalisation of border control (B1, D2, D3), and Ireland’s profit-driven system of direct welfare provision for asylum-seekers (D2). Another common assessment strategy was to note how the game did not accurately reflect certain rights and duties set out under prevailing legal instruments, such as the 1951 *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, the and the EU’s *Procedures and Reception Conditions Directives* (A2, B4, C9). As a general reflection on the advantages of GBL, some students linked PP to the BBC’s ‘Syrian Journey’ game they had played earlier in the year (B6, B9, C6), while another reported discussing PP with classmates and friends outside of college (B8)

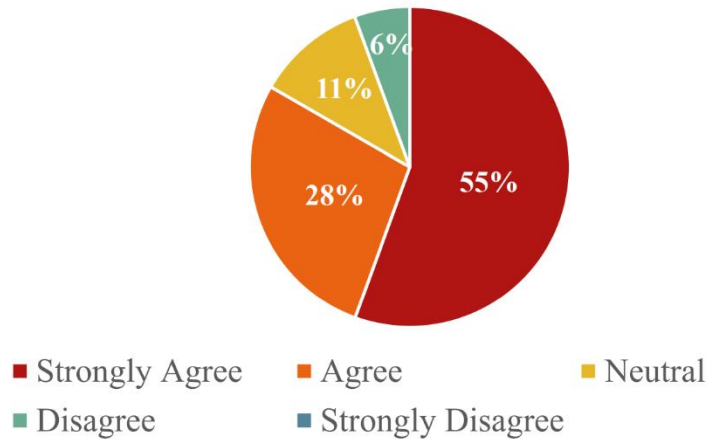


Figure 4: responses to *After completing this assignment I am more likely to remember the subject-matter than if I had completed a traditional written assignment*

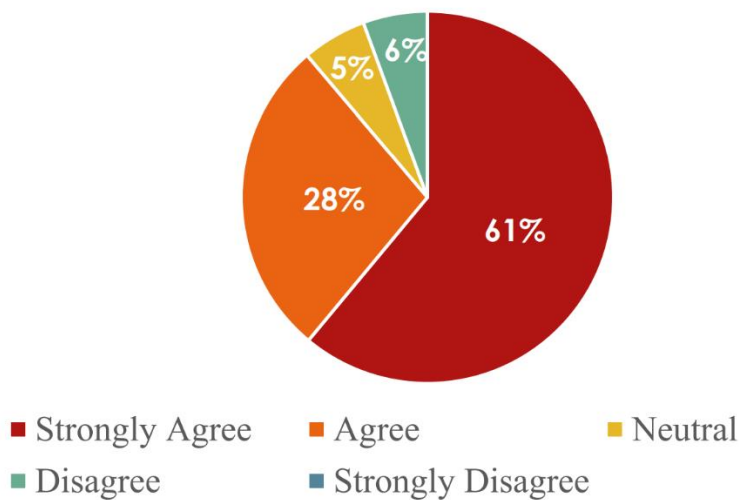


Figure 5: responses to *Blogging on Brightspace helped me to link the video game to the course content and reading materials*

These common themes clearly evidence sustained reflection across a variety of topics, and affirm McKernan’s (2019) proposition that video games can be particularly effective when paired with, or used as, appropriate supplementary resources. Having completed the assignment, students said they were more likely to remember the subject-matter than if they had completed a traditional written assignment (Figure 4). Students also appear to have recognised the important role that ‘blogging’ played in this process (Figure 5). There was disagreement, however, as to whether the assignment resulted in depth or breadth of learning: two students observed that “the broad nature of the assignment encouraged deeper insights”, but another student observed that they finished the assignment with a general overview of several concepts rather than a comprehensive understanding of any of them (anonymous feedback).

Anecdotally, at least, there remains reason to be optimistic about the assignment's effects on student learning. Plagiarism detection software gave the PP assignment an average similarity score of 13%, whereas a traditional written assignment assigned over the 2019-2020 academic year received an average score of 26%. While caution is advised when affording weight to both plagiarism detection software and students' self-reported behaviour (Johannes et al., 2021; Weber-Wulff, 2019), these data suggest that using a video game as a call to reflection can trigger deep and experiential learning processes, and improve students' perceptions of learning and assessment.

Role-Play and Reflection

The act of role-play appears to have served as a particularly powerful call to reflection. By “stepping into the role” of an immigration officer (A3), students were not just applying elements of immigration law in practice; they were confronted with the consequences of their actions:

As I continued the game, I was forced to deny entry to many travellers for some minor discrepancies in their documentation. Each time I denied someone, their reactions stuck with me... This led me to reflect on the difficulties and potential traumas that can arise from borders... (D2, essay)

Other students' essays evidence similar deep-learning and metacognitive processes, such as identifying subconscious norms and values, evaluating oneself as a learner, and making recommendations as to how the game could be improved (Toh & Kirschner, 2020). Students reported how their sense of right and wrong was gradually eroded by mounting rules and regulations (A2); how they became increasingly robotic in the performance of their ‘job,’ stripping themselves – and the immigrants who are the focus of their work – of their humanity (A1, C5, D5). Students also experimented with various strategies in order to avoid a premature ‘Game Over’ screen. In most cases, the game forced students to abandon what was morally right in favour of what was necessary to preserve themselves and their families. In reflecting on the moral and ethical implications of these self-directed learning strategies, students affirmed (and in some cases, drew on) the literature on PP and the modern bureaucratic state (Exmeyer & Boden, 2020; Morrissette, 2017). Students described their avatar as having no agency (A2, A6, B4, C2, C3), as being “at the mercy of the State”, and thus “forced to be complicit in the rejection of individuals who need help” (D2). Some sought

to diminish their responsibility for inhumane decisions by dismissing the immigration officer as “nothing more than a cog in a powerful bureaucratic system” (A3). This language indirectly invokes Weber, who described the fully developed bureaucratic system as a machine of precision, speed, unambiguity, and unity (1978, p. 973), as well as the game’s creator, Lucas Pope, who wanted players to realise “how good people can be turned into uncaring cogs” (Formosa et al., 2016, p. 212). As a result, a number of students sympathised with the plight of the immigration officer and the pressures they find themselves under (A2, A6, B1, B6, B7, C2, C8, D3). This is consistent with other studies on how role-playing a particular character impacts perspective-taking (Peña & Hernández Pérez, 2020; Peña et al., 2018). Through gameplay, players came to inhabit Weber’s “iron cage” – a system of objective bureaucracy “in which rationalization and intellectualization have replaced the interpersonal ties that once connected individuals to one another” (Morrisette, 2017). Students came to view their relationships with in-game migrants as a series of suffocating moral and financial exchanges (Kelly, 2018, p. 472), despite knowing that their actions were often morally indefensible (A1, A3, B2, B9, C3, C9, D2). This disparity between the self and the ‘expressed self’ (the digital proxy of the player as produced by the culmination of their in-game decisions and behaviours) appears to have provoked significant self-reflection from students, as per Sarian (2019). PP’s procedural rhetoric on systems also appears to have been particularly useful in provoking processes of conceptualisation, deconstruction, and reflection.

Accommodating alternative learning styles

The audio-visual stimulus offered by video games also resonated with many students. Students reflected that PP’s “minimal colour scheme and low graphic quality” helped to reinforce the desperate situations of the migrants they were encountering, and the “dull”, “austere”, “robotic bureaucracy” that the player had to work with (A4, A5, B7, D3, B1). Others noted how the music – an “ominous and oppressive” military anthem – was particularly effective in immersing the player in the in-game world (A6, B1, C5, D3). This suggests that video games are an effective means of accommodating a greater range of learning styles, including auditory, aural, visual, and kinaesthetic. It would appear that students agree (Figure 6). In anonymous feedback, one student found the game “more stimulating for the mind than reading materials alone”, while another described the assessment as “somewhat of a relief from traditional methods used by the majority of other modules”. This is particularly important in the context of legal education which is faced with an increasingly diverse student body, many of whom go on to careers outside of the legal

profession. Legal education typically rewards literacy skills such as persuasive writing; statutory interpretation; and written and oral communication. After completing this assignment, however, 15 of the 18 students surveyed said that it tested strengths that they didn't typically get to showcase in traditional written assignments (Figure 7). This suggests that video games are generally effective in developing and rewarding multiple intelligences, but may be particularly useful in legal education (Moffett et al., 2017).

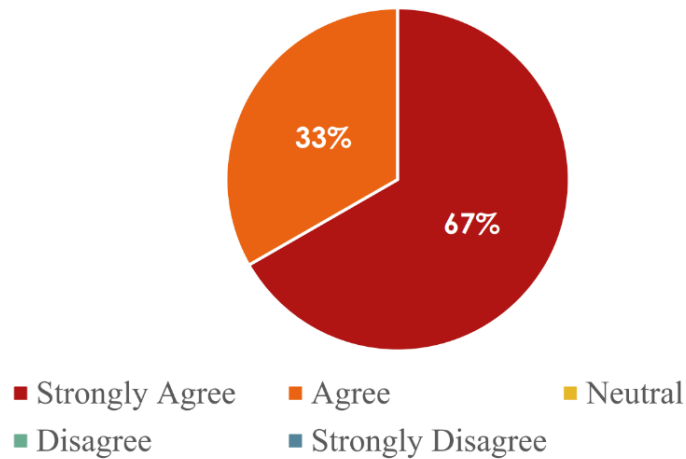


Figure 6: response to *Video games are an accessible resource that can respond to alternative learning styles*

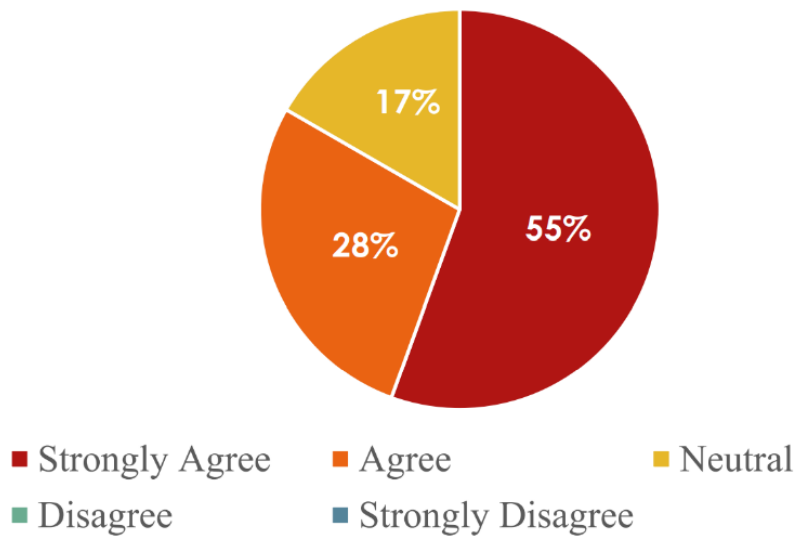


Figure 7: responses to *This assessment tested strengths that I don't get to showcase in traditional written assignments*

Technical Difficulties

That said, utilising a video game as an educational resource is not without its difficulties. Gifting the game through Steam required a significant time commitment of the lecturer, and further time had to be afforded to occasional technical support. For the most part, however,

Steam served its purpose, and all students were able to complete the assignment. The gameplay itself proved more of a challenge. Many students reported that they struggled with the game at the start and were not sure what exactly they were supposed to be doing (B1, B3, B6, C6, anonymous feedback). Students felt that the game required a significant investment of time and focus, and were often left frustrated that they were not progressing in-game (A4, A5, B5, B8, C6). There was also concern among some students that their failure to progress would negatively impact their grade for the assignment (A4, B8), though these concerns appear to have eased after students received their grade (Figure 8). Nevertheless, 61% of those surveyed recommended a tutorial on how to play the game, or a longer grace period between students receiving the game and being asked to complete an assignment on it. Another suggestion was the provision of 'tip sheets' that might provide further background on the game's mechanics to 'gaming novices' (B1). Self-professed 'gamers' reported no major issues with the challenging gameplay, but expressed concern for less-experienced classmates who may have been at a disadvantage (anonymous feedback #6, #8). This highlights the potential of peer tutoring in a GBL context, both as a means to overcome technical difficulties and to enhance deep learning processes (Barr, 2018). Future attempts to recreate this case-study should duly take account of these important suggestions.

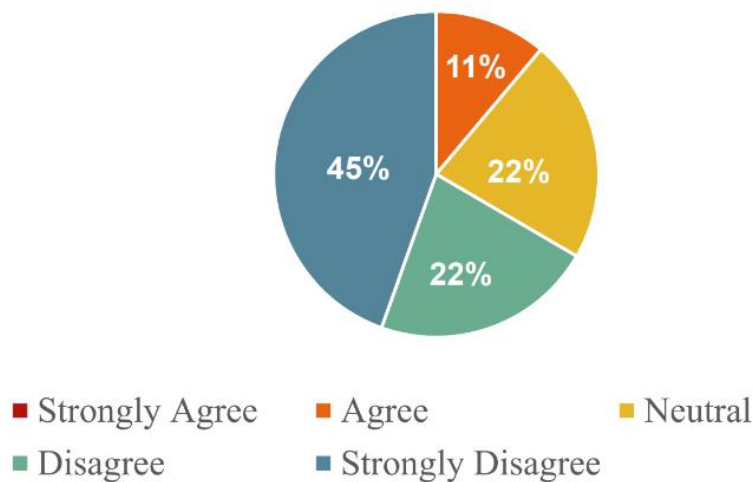


Figure 8: responses to *I felt that the way that the assignment was marked punished me for not 'completing' the game*

While students critiqued the game and its mechanics within the parameters of the assignment, only 5% noted that they did not enjoy their time with the game. One student expressed a preference for a traditional written essay, while another found that PP offered an overly simplistic portrayal of immigration control compared to the lecturing materials (B7, A4). Indeed, the simplicity of PP was a common criticism in students' reflections (B3, C6, C8).

Despite these critiques, students remained engaged in Kolb's learning cycle throughout each stage of the assignment: cycles of gameplay supported by cycles of reflection, leading to abstract conceptualisation of the experience through a final reflection. Indeed, one student who had expressed dissatisfaction with PP conceded that the process of writing the reflection did highlight the positive aspects of the game, and had caused a shift in her view of the game as a learning tool (B7). While it duly appears that video games can facilitate experiential learning (Newbery-Jones, 2016), games themselves are just one aspect of this experience. Deep learning does not automatically occur when students are playing, or even enjoying these games: it occurs when they are reflecting on and conceptualising those experiences. If video games are to be embedded in a module, then teaching and learning activities must be constructively aligned so that those key processes can occur.

Conclusion

This case-study sought to further align module aims with teaching, learning, and assessment activities on a third-level module on immigration and asylum law by means of a commercially successful video game. There is good reason to conclude that it was a success in this regard. Through gameplay and reflection, students were asking the questions expected of graduates of this module: *Why do borders exist? (D2) Why is there a need to police them? Why do we have rules as to who can and can't cross borders? What effects do these rules have on the people who must interpret and apply them, and on those to whom they are applied?* These questions are characteristic of the critical thinkers and responsible global citizens that TU Dublin hopes to empower (TU Dublin, 2020). Students were also more engaged with the resources that might provide answers to these questions. Embedding PP in assessment encouraged students to recall prior learning and revisit supplemental resources in order to draw linkages/differences between the game and the course content. In this manner, teaching, learning, and assessment activities were more constructively aligned.

However, the act of playing a video game offered a unique learning experience that could not be facilitated by reading materials alone. PP offered a low fidelity simulation in which students could apply the concepts that they had been learning about, and consider their operation in practice. This encouraged students to express original insights of their own, and to empathise with the human aspect of migration that is so often underrepresented in legal scholarship in this field. That is not to say that PP is a complete or accurate depiction of the lived experiences of migrants and asylum-seekers (Sou, 2018; Orme, 2017; Chin & Golding,

2016). Indeed, students themselves noted the limits of the role-play experience and the system of immigration presented in the game. But even in doing so, students were brought through ascending levels of cognition and cycles of experiential learning. The steep learning curve present in PP required an intellectual investment from students that resulted in them gaining knowledge of the rules of the virtual space, understanding them, and applying them to progress through the game. Students had to analyse these rules and the in-game world to overcome obstacles as they arose. Students then deconstructed the procedural rhetoric present in PP (synthesis), and evaluated the game as a whole in terms of the message it communicates. In this manner, students were carried through the various levels of Bloom's taxonomy (Anderson et al., 2001), and remained engaged in processes of metacognition and abstract conceptualisation throughout the assignment.

In addition to the benefits to student learning processes, it appears that this GBL approach improved student perceptions of learning and assessment. The response to PP was overwhelmingly positive: the majority of students surveyed enjoying their time with the game and were in favour of more games-based assessments. 15 students said the games-based assignment tested strengths that they didn't typically get to showcase in traditional written assignments, and another 15 agreed that they were more likely to remember the subject-matter having completed a games-based assignment instead of a typical essay. These responses, together with the audio-visual, emotional, empathetic, and kinaesthetic stimuli provided by video games, suggest that GBL approaches should be broadly considered to further develop and reward a variety of intelligences. This is particularly relevant to legal education, which tends to cater to verbal and literal learners. GBL can thus be used to develop skills that may be applicable outside of the legal profession, as well as the digital competences necessary for living in a digitized world, as per the EU's Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027 (European Commission, 2020; Moffett et al., 2017). While the small size of the sample and the self-reported nature of the data are recognised, these findings are consistent with the literature on GBL approaches and the acquisition of transferable skills (Alonso-Díaz et al., 2019; Barr, 2018, 2017).

Gaming is not for everyone, however, and it is important to consider the input of those who did not enjoy their time with 'Papers, Please,' so as to better inform future interventions. Students reported that the gameplay in PP took getting used to and offered very little guidance on its various mechanics. As ease of use is an important indicator of student acceptance of

games-based resources (Bourgonjon et al., 2010), it is crucial that the necessary support structures are in place to make the experience of adjusting to the resource easier for all students. Future attempts to recreate this case-study should duly take account of the important feedback offered by those surveyed:

- Make the game available as early as possible, and allow a ‘free roam’ period during which students can familiarise themselves with the game.
- Run occasional tutorials on the game to guide students through initial gameplay and mechanics (Tutorials were planned as part of this intervention but proved technically problematic due to Covid-19).
- Incorporate peer tutoring in tutorials to ameliorate stress; foster social learning and collaborative problem-solving; and enhance communication skills.
- Where practicable, provide ‘tip sheets’ or a link to an online guide on the game for novice gamers who may be new to the medium.

Students can also lack confidence in GBL assessments which do not align with their preconceived notions of education, and the experience of moving from teacher-centred learning to self-directed student learning can be turbulent (Barr, 2018). This is particularly true in legal education, which tends to be didactic in instruction and conservative in assessment (Moffett et al., 2017). Indeed, one student in this study expressed a preference for a typical written essay, while two others noted that the broad reflections they took from the GBL assignment were different to the narrow depth of knowledge they would take from a critical essay. Putting the necessary support structures in place is central to developing digital confidence and competence in these students, and opening them up to experiential learning experiences that might reward their additional intelligences (Moffett et al., 2017; Bourgonjon et al., 2010).

There is no doubt that video games have incredible potential to offer additional learning experiences to those encountered in the traditional classroom. Though finding the appropriate game is subject to time and financial constraints, technical support, syllabus requirements, and other issues (Susi et al., 2007); the innovation borne of this effort may be worth it. In this case study, students expressed a desire for more GBL in the future, and acknowledged its potential to further engage students; to facilitate active learning; and even moral reasoning. Video games thus present a unique opportunity for teachers to engage students as meaningful

partners and collaborators in an active and experiential learning environment where everyone has something to learn from one another – a GBL classroom where everybody wins.

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