

## Coding Meaningful Actions in Children's Digital Citizenship Web Games

Given increasing concerns over digital privacy and cyberbullying, several web games for children have been created to teach digital citizenship. Google's *Interland* encourages kids to be "Internet Awesome" while PBS Kids' *Webonauts Internet Academy* tells them to "Observe, Respect, Contribute." Common Sense's *Digital Passport* games tell players to be an "Upstander" and guard their privacy. Each platform provides the player with a different level of storytelling, emotional engagement, and problem solving. The *Digital Passport* games offer the least context and storytelling, while *Interland* has a basic you-oriented narrative and *Webonauts* provides a fully fictionalized narrative. A study by Bachen et. al (2016) suggests that serious games like these need to "prioritize creating interfaces and game play that encourage players to engage with [...] cognitive, emotional, and communicat[ive] experiences" to create empathy and identification. By contrasting the storytelling and design choices of *Interland*, *Webonauts*, and *Digital Passport*, I indicate missed opportunities to create meaningful player choices and complex character responses. To meet their goals for creating empathy as well as informing the player about dangers, these games should take greater care with offering player rewards, provide more feedback about the possible consequences of actions, and incorporate more storytelling to simulate the depth of digital decision making.

To foster engagement, serious games need to incorporate "demanding (but not impossible) tasks, [...] continuous feedback, and opportunities for repetition" (Mettler and Pinto, 2015). While these three games do allow for negative choices and fail states, they lack meaningful consequences and create disconnection between the physical action of the game and mental choice represented in the content. While these games all include important information about privacy and anti-bullying, they miss the mark for effective engagement because they fail to simulate the complexity of choices that would challenge a player to think differently. Game-based learning has great potential for fostering empathy (Belman and Flanagan 2010) and simulating complex and ill-defined issues like cyberbullying and online privacy. By taking advantage of the procedural rhetoric offered by video games, these digital citizenship games could more readily provide the necessary context required for embodied action (Gee 2003; Bogost 2007).