



That Dragon, Cancer: The use of
a digital interactive narrative in
teaching about family illness,
death and bereavement

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That Dragon, Cancer



- [Game trailer](#)
 - youtu.be/vlKCJlhJwxU
- Numinous Games, 2016



Video Games = Pedagogy??

Why us games?



- Interactivity and choice
- Potential for reflection
- Opportunity for practice (Colby & Colby, 2008; Kapp, Blair, & Mesch, 2014; Maguth, List, & Wunderle, 2015)

Literature Review



Video games are used in the classroom:

- For skill acquisition (e.g., math facts or typing games)
- For skill application or practice (e.g., using Minecraft to apply math knowledge; Ellison, Evans, & Pike, 2016)
- In cases of games specifically designed for classroom use (Sadler, Romine, Stuart, & Merle-Johnson, 2013)
- No research could be found addressing the use of video games in the social sciences to provide a realistic interactive simulation of social dynamics

Our study



- Pedagogical goals:
 - Students will experience a simulation of the family dynamics surrounding illness, death, and bereavement
 - Students will apply their knowledge of the ABC-X model of family stress to that simulation

Our study



- Study goals:
 - Did *That Dragon, Cancer* contribute to students' understanding of course concepts?
 - Did students consider *That Dragon, Cancer* to be a worthwhile assignment?

Method



- Recruited from existing course
 - Extra credit
- Play or view walkthrough video; complete reflection paper
- Online qualitative survey

Method



- Reflect on your experience of *That Dragon, Cancer*. What did you like about this activity?
- What did you not like about this activity?
- What about *That Dragon, Cancer* was unexpected to you?
- How did interacting with *That Dragon, Cancer* help you understand concepts from our class?
- Would you recommend that this activity be assigned in future semesters?
- What would you change about this assignment in future semesters?
- What would you keep the same about this assignment?

Participants



- 29 undergraduates
 - 19 juniors, 10 seniors
 - 26 female
 - 2 viewed walkthrough video only
 - 7 both played and viewed walkthrough

Results: Likes and dislikes



Responses varied widely:

“I fell in love with the creative dialogue that drew me in to the point where I had to write down every single word...I was hypnotized.”

“I felt like this game got too close to a very intimate part of a persons [sic] psyche. It made me feel slightly violated. The content was too heavy to explore in a video game.”

Results: Themes



- The game *personalized* family dynamics surrounding illness, death, and bereavement
- The game gave course content an *emotional impact*
- Playing this game represented a *unique learning experience*
- The game was *technically challenging and frustrating*

Discussion



- *That Dragon, Cancer* was a unique way to allow students to get “hands-on” experience with family dynamics
- Participant consensus was that the assignment was worthwhile
- Gameplay is not straightforward—encourage students to patiently experience the game rather than trying to play through quickly

References



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