

**DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS AND SENSITIVITY
THROUGH DIGITAL GAME PLAY**

—

**THREE CASE STUDIES WITH THE SIMULATION *REALLIVES 2010*
IN AUSTRALIAN, AMERICAN, AND SWISS MIDDLE SCHOOLS**

Thesis submitted by

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SUMMARY

This thesis investigates the potential of the digital simulation *RealLives* for the promotion of intercultural awareness and sensitivity in 12- to 13-year-old middle school students. It comprises three case studies conducted in International Baccalaureate Schools in Australia, Switzerland, and the USA, where teachers used *RealLives* with groups of seventh-grade students in different ways. Using an interpretivist approach, each case study consisted of observations, in-depth interviews with students and teachers, and questionnaire surveys to examine the use of *RealLives* by students and teachers in different school contexts and investigate the potential of the simulation for the development of intercultural awareness and sensitivity amongst young adolescents within classroom settings.

As the findings of the three case studies show, *RealLives* was perceived largely positively by students and teachers in all three contexts. However, the teachers struggled to thoroughly integrate the simulation into their teaching, mainly due to limited time and resources, dense curricula, and technical difficulties. Although each teacher employed the medium in different ways, similar patterns and strategies of use and similar social dynamics emerged among students in all three case studies. Students used the simulation *RealLives* in potentially unique personally meaningful ways. Their use of and interaction with the simulation as well as its potential to promote intercultural awareness and sensitivity were determined by a range of intraindividual and interindividual factors, first and foremost by knowledge and experience, identity, and social learning.

The findings provide evidence that using *RealLives* in school contexts can promote the development of intercultural awareness and sensitivity in a variety of ways. It can increase intercultural awareness in student players — even in students who are already more interculturally competent or focus on game play rather than learning. Moreover, it can advance the development of intercultural sensitivity by creating/reinforcing curiosity in cultural issues, encouraging openness and flexibility through confrontation with new information and unfamiliar situations, and providing a wealth of opportunities for identification with characters and role playing, which can promote empathy and more ethnorelative worldviews.

Overall, the study shows that using a digital game or simulation like *RealLives* can be a valuable educational strategy to promote intercultural awareness and sensitivity and one that adolescents would enjoy, particularly when it is thoroughly integrated into teaching, accompanied by complementary activities, such as discussions and debriefings, and guided by a knowledgeable teacher.

STATEMENT OF CANDIDATE

I herewith certify that the work in this thesis entitled “Developing Intercultural Awareness and Sensitivity Through Digital Game Play — Three Case Studies with the Simulation *RealLives 2010* in Australian, American, and Swiss Middle Schools” has not previously been submitted for a degree, nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University and the University of Erfurt, Germany.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

The research presented in this thesis was approved by Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee, reference number HE27FEB2009-D06349, on April 5, 2009.

Anika Struppert
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