A video game puts players in the shoes of cyberbullying victims

Normally, video games transform players into the heroes of a successful mission. But not *Connected*, a video game developed by a research team at the Complutense University of Madrid with the goal of generating empathy with the victims of harassment and cyberbullying at school. Instead, players are transformed into victims experiencing the same ostracism as thousands of other adolescents in the real world.

Due to the worldwide incidence of bullying, an English translation of the video game is planned. / Alexas Photos.

UCC-UCM, 11 June. The [e-UCM](#) research team at the Complutense University of Madrid has designed and developed *Conectado*, a video game that allows players to walk in the shoes of victims of school bullying and cyberbullying in order to raise their awareness of its effects.

"At present, teachers lack the tools to tackle the problem of bullying and cyberbullying in class and raise students' awareness of the consequences of their actions. This game offers a familiar format for young people that will allow teachers to make students think about the effects of the experience", explained Antonio Calvo Morata, a researcher in the department of Software Engineering and Artificial Intelligence at the Complutense University of Madrid and one of the authors of *Conectado.*

Aimed at children aged between 12 and 17 years old, the game is compatible with Windows and Linux and is available for free [download](#). "We hope to release a version for Android devices and other websites in the coming months, since the engine will support this. We are also working on an English version in order to launch the video game in other countries because bullying and cyberbullying are global problems", Calvo Morata added.

Conectada starts with the first day of class in a new school, when the player begins to experience bullying and cyberbullying by a classmate. Over the next five days within the game, other students start to participate in the victimisation.

"Players see how their classmates gradually start to ignore them, send them hurtful messages and assume their identity on social media, converting them into victims of bullying and cyberbullying", continued the UCM researcher.

Conquering nightmares

As in real life, besides exclusion at school, players also have to endure a night of nightmares in the form of mini-games that induce feelings of frustration, anxiety and powerlessness.

Image of one of the scenes from *Conectado*. / e-UCM.

"Our goal is to help students develop empathy with the victims through closer identification and better understanding so that they refuse to participate in bullying. This will also enable teachers to lead a supervised discussion to help students understand the consequences of their actions, as well as the importance of asking for help and not looking the other way", Calvo Morata noted.

To develop the video game, the researchers analysed the state of the art on school bullying and cyberbullying and video games on this subject, and then produced a first version for assessment by experts, teachers and psychologists which was road-tested with students at the Inmaculada de Puerta de Hierro school in Madrid, the Salvador Victoria high school in Teruel and the Valdespartera high school in Zaragoza.

The latest version was tested with eighty teachers and over one hundred teacher training degree students "to determine whether present and future teachers consider *Conectado* a useful tool that they can use in their classes", the researcher added. The results have been published in *IEEE Access.* To date, the game has been tested with more than 1,000 students from 10 high schools in different regions in Spain.

Developed with the support of the Telefonica-Complutense Chair for Digital Education and Serious Games, *Conectado* also explores other contemporary issues such as digital footprints and social media sites, among others. In addition, Calvo Morato announced "we are currently working with an ESCUNI

Complutense University of Madrid
Vice Chancellor's Office for Knowledge Transfer and Entrepreneurship
Research Results Transfer Office (Spanish initials: OTRI)

educator to produce a teacher's guide to help professionals use the game in class to tackle the problem of bullying".

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