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Nov. 12: It's How You Play the Game: Carnegie Mellon Professor Asks What a Video Game Tells Us About Making Peace

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[Asks What a Video Game Tells Us About Making Peace](#)

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It's How You Play the Game: Carnegie Mellon Professor Asks What a Video Game Tells Us About Making Peace

PITTSBURGH — A Carnegie Mellon University professor is using the PeaceMaker video game - which calls on players to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict - to study how a person's background and knowledge of the conflict influences how they negotiate a solution.

Cleotilde Gonzalez, director of the university's [Dynamic Decision Making Laboratory](#), wants to know how students sympathetic to one side or another play the game differently, and how students' strategies change as they learn more about the conflict. Gonzalez is conducting her research at Carnegie Mellon in Pittsburgh, [Carnegie Mellon in Qatar](#) and through the Peres Center for Peace in Israel, where as many as 10,000 Israeli and Palestinian youth will participate in the study.

In PeaceMaker, which was developed by Carnegie Mellon spin-off Impact Games, each player assumes the role of the Israeli or Palestinian leader and is presented with a scenario in which multiple and interrelated choices are made in a constantly changing environment. Gonzalez said that while many people have studied sequential decision making, research has rarely focused on this kind of realistic, dynamic decision making. Impact Games has modified the game for Gonzalez's research so that it can record every action a player makes during the game.



Urban Challenge

- Nov. 2: Carnegie Mellon Biomedical Engineering Researcher Works To Develop New Drug Delivery System by Using Adult Neural Stem Cells
- Nov. 1: New Miller Gallery Exhibitions at Carnegie Mellon Showcase Maurides, Stitzlein and Stunden

With funding from the Lounsberry Foundation, Gonzalez is working with Kiron Skinner, director of the International Relations Program, and Laurie Eisenberg, associate teaching professor of history, who teaches a course titled "The Arab-Israeli Condition: War and Peace." Students in the class played the game at the beginning of the semester and will play the game again at the end of the course. Eisenberg and Gonzalez have developed questions to gauge the students' familiarity with the conflict. Gonzalez will track how students' views change over the course of the semester and how this influences their game play. She wants to know, among other things, whether understanding both sides of the story helps players resolve the conflict successfully.

"We see this project as a first step in advancing our research in applying decision science and simulation techniques to real-life social and political dilemmas. Our findings stand to improve training services in crisis management and conflict resolution," said Gonzalez, an associate research professor in the Department of Social and Decision Sciences.

Next semester, Gonzalez will conduct a similar study with students at Carnegie Mellon's campus at Education City in Doha, Qatar, and she also hopes to include students at the other American campuses at Education City. At the Peres Center in Israel, a study will be run through the center's IT Peace Projects Department. Israeli and Palestinian youth will participate in a series of workshops in which each child will play PeaceMaker as both the Israeli prime minister and the Palestinian leader.

"The data we collect will help us understand what strategies students follow in the game, how these strategies compare when they play each of the two sides and how do strategies differ according to the children's backgrounds," Gonzalez said.

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