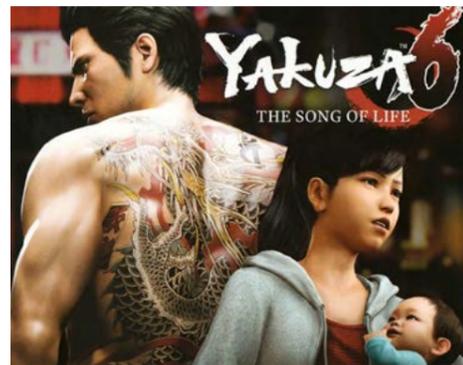Copyright Epic Games

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Games

Let's "play" video games!
Interpreting stereotypes in video games

TOGETHER FOR CHANGE

Competences

2.2 Sharing through digital technologies

2.3 Engaging in citizenship through digital technologies

Tags	Time frame	Audience
• Stereotypes • Representations • Iconography • Theatre • Physicalness	6 hours	Age 11–18

Overview

This activity aims to address the topic of stereotypes. The word "stereotype" is a term borrowed from typographical terminology. Initially it referred to an invention by Monsieur Didot, who devised a system for duplicating typographic plates: thanks to this invention it became possible to print the same page many times. The term was then used in psychology and sociology to indicate a preconceived and rigid idea, in particular with respect to a group of people. It is easy to imagine how a stereotype referring to certain categories of people can form the basis of hate speech.

Very often, we are not even really aware of the stereotypes to which we are exposed, and which we unknowingly "absorb" during the course of our daily lives.

The activity we propose intends to increase awareness and a critical capacity in the participants, via an analysis of the stereotypes present in the imagery of video games. Our intent is not to "censor" video games, or to accuse them of promoting the development of stereotypes or prejudices, but rather to encourage more conscious and critical use of such games among the younger generations.

The characters chosen by the players (their avatars) take on a central role in the activity. Yee and Bailenson (2007) coined the term "the Proteus effect", to refer to the phenomenon via which an avatar's characteristics influence our way of acting in the virtual world, according to a stereotyped behaviour model. The use of theatrical techniques focusing on the characterisation of characters taken from video games helps to bring out

stereotypes and prejudices, extrapolating them at the same time from the playful environment of the game.

The theatrical techniques lend themselves to bringing out a greater complexity in the creation of the characters. At the same time, through the theatrical game, physicality plays a significant role and leads the participants to "feel through the body".

Via an activity that requires physical participation, the participants are called to question the stereotypes present in the graphic representations linked to the context of the video game.

Context

This activity can be used in formal and informal educational contexts.

It requires the use of a space in which participants are free to move around.

Objective

To encourage participants to question the stereotypes present in our daily lives, and in particular, those present in video games. To stimulate a creative process that, taking physical participation as its starting point, questions and deconstructs stereotypes.

Required media

- Images of avatars from participants' favourite video games.
- Images of the front covers of some video games chosen by the activity leader (see links).

Working Methods

This activity aims to move from online to theatrical play in order to deconstruct the stereotyped imagery of the characters of the video games. The theatrical training is aimed at deconstructing the patterns of movement that each of us tends to reproduce. At the same time, the participants are invited to reflect on and question the stereotyped imagery of some video games. The performative dimension creates a context in which you know that your actions are being observed. This facilitates the development of a "meta vision" that allows us to observe and question our actions and behaviours.

Theatre games promote an atmosphere of mutual trust, which makes it easier to get involved and experiment, thus promoting the development of creative solutions.

Overview
The first part of the workshop consists of examining more deeply the concept of "Stereotype". Participants investigate the meaning of this word and the existence of stereotypes in their daily lives. This is followed by reflecting on the stereotypes present in video games.

Time: 2–3 hours

Media
- video games known by the participants
- ability to send images to the activity leader's pc / tablet / mobile phone

Equipment
- room in which it is possible for the group to stand in a circle and move freely
- Flipcharts, markers
- Mobile phones with Internet connection
- Computer connected to the Internet and projector

Introductory game
The participants are arranged in a circle. In turn, each participant says their name and mimics a characteristic that represents them (for example, if I am studious, I may mime the gesture of reading, if I practise a sport, I mime the movement, if I am short-sighted, I may make 'glasses' by cupping my hands to my eyes, if I play an instrument, I mime it and so on...). The others imitate the gesture.

The groupings

Participants are asked to walk freely around the space, without speaking. The activity leader asks the participants to observe each other carefully while walking and names an element; the participants create homogeneous groups based on that element. For example: the leader says "hair", and participants who think they have similar hair gather together, without speaking. The leader moves around the groups and asks for the criteria according to which they are divided: it can be length, but also colour, style... The activity is repeated 4-5 times. The leader proposes subdividing again on the basis of new categories by choosing a level of greater or lesser depth, depending on the group (on the basis of clothes or footwear for example...)

Outline for debriefing: were the groups homogeneous? Did they always remain the same? Can one person be similar to another in one aspect and different in another? Were the criteria according to which groups were formed always the same?

The concept of stereotype is introduced: what is it? How would you define it? Have you ever experienced stereotyping? If so, what kind? How did you feel? Have you ever become aware, on the other hand, that you hold a stereotyped image with respect to a group of people? When?

The activity leader transcribes the participants' answers onto a flipchart.

Icebreaker game: One two three "monster statues"

Variant of the classic "Statues" game in which the participants approach the goal, assuming "monstrous" positions when freezing.

I am my avatar: The activity leader asks the participants which video games they usually play and what kind of avatars they use. The participants send an image of their avatar - or, alternatively, that of a video game character they particularly like - to the activity leader, by mobile phone, without sharing the image with the rest of the group. The activity leader puts the images together in a folder on the PC.

Participants walk around the space, stretching their muscles and making whatever movements they like.

The leader asks the participants to gradually start walking and moving like their avatar. When everyone has adopted their avatar's posture and attitudes, the group is divided into two: actors and spectators. The spectators sit, while the actors continue to move in what is identified as a stage space. Meanwhile, the leader projects the avatar images on the wall. When participants believe they have identified which actor corresponds to which avatar, they say so. If the pairing is correct, the actor stops. Once all avatars have been identified, the groups change over.

A small debrief follows: possible questions to guide the debriefing:

Were the avatars easily recognisable from your walks? How did you manage to enhance their recognisability? Did acting in a stereotyped way, "like a character is expected to move", facilitate identification by the group? What do stereotypes have to do with this?

SEGMENT 2

Overview
In this second part the participants work on iconography.

Time: 2-3 hours

Media
Video games covers.

Equipment
• large space providing the possibility to move freely
• mats for lying on the ground
• video game cover images

A short time for opening with greetings. The participants, arranged in a circle, take turns saying their name and miming something that represents them. The others imitate this by way of response.

The leader asks if participants mimed the same or different as in the previous meeting, and points out that nobody can be represented through a single characteristic.

Drama warm-up
The participants lie down on the mats arranged on the ground and the leader guides the relaxation. Participants relax their bodies by focusing on one area at a time, starting from the tips of the feet and working their way up to the head.

The leader then asks the participants to start moving one part of the body at a time, trying to make movements that are not habitual for them. The movements become larger and larger, until the participants are standing, continuing to move their bodies around the space as if surprised at themselves. As the participants move around the space, the animator says "freeze" out loud and the participants freeze. The leader invites the participants to observe each other in the positions in which they find themselves and then to start again. The sequence repeats a few times. Slowly, the participants make their movements smaller and smaller, until they begin to walk normally around the room.

The leader asks the participants to form couples. Mirror game: within each couple, the participants stand facing each other and decide who will lead and who will follow. The leader of the pair performs movements, their partner imitates them as if in a mirror. After a few minutes, the participants exchange roles. The couples separate and go off to form others.

This time the game is that of the clay statue. The sculptor "models" the other's body as if it were made of clay. After a few minutes, roles are reversed.

Short debriefing: what happened? Was it easier to lead or be led?

The leader provides participants with some video game cover images.

Divided into groups, the participants choose an image and recreate it. In turn, a "sculptor" models the bodies of the other members of the group, in order to

reproduce the chosen cover.

Once the result is satisfactory, the sculptor photographs the image obtained.

Debriefing: what types of characters are represented? What positions do the characters take? Are different types represented in different ways? Do you identify the presence of stereotypes in these representations?

The leader requests that the living sculptures be altered in such a way as to overturn the stereotypes. The outcome is very free, leaving plenty of room for the participants to give free reign to their creativity.

In a plenary session, each group shows the passage from the original sculpture to the one in which stereotypes are overturned. The other participants suggest changes and intervene until everyone is satisfied with the final image. A photo of this sculpture is also taken.

Debriefing: How did you feel? How did your body feel in the different positions? Are there any power relationships in video game cover graphics?
And while we play video games? What stereotypes do we encounter?

Conclusion: projection in the plenary session of the original cover images, of the "faithful" reproduction by the participants, and of the "overturned" stereotype

In a nutshell

Via dramatised exercises, the participants "play" and deconstruct the stereotypes present in the video game images, acquiring greater awareness and critical capabilities.

Additional options / Variations

Based on the proposal presented here, participants could act out real game sequences that can be filmed and reviewed.

Sources / Links

Some video game cover images:
- Far Cry 4
- Yakuza 6
- Fortnite
- League of Legends
- GTA VI
- SuperMario
- Nick Yee & Jeremy Bailenson "The Proteus Effect: The Effect of Transformed Self-Representation on Behaviour", Department of Communication, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305, 2007 web.stanford.edu/~bailenso/papers/proteus%20effect.pdf
- Youtube videos on representation of black people in videogames (English language): www.youtube.com/watch?v=1-xEABBlk_8
- Colour Coded: Race, Gender, and Representation in Video Games www.youtube.com/watch?v=yGl4kWJWdl0
- Are Games Racist? | Game/Show | PBS Digital Studios www.youtube.com/watch?v=brnpRhjJl8w