

Serious Training for Serious Gaming: Challenges in Training Youth Facilitators on Sexual Rights

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General Theme: Serious games have been used to address social inequalities by creating less formal, or more private, modes of engagement with topics that might be considered sensitive or difficult. Sexual Rights are, especially in the context of disadvantaged youngsters in Portugal, both an important topic and one that has received very little attention, as formal Sexual Education programmes have suffered from systemic deficiencies. As members of the EU Kids Online Portugal team, we had the opportunity to be part of the entire process of design and implementation of the training aimed at creating and using a serious game on the topic of Sexual Rights, which focuses on disadvantaged youths as its main target. This game was created due to a grant received by the Portuguese Association for Family Planning (APF). The project was active throughout 2015. Problem: The development of a serious game in the area of Sexual Rights targeting socially disadvantaged youngsters but, at the same time, open for anyone to access online, requires both a very wide and inclusive approach, and also training targeted at adults who will work with the disadvantaged youths. This creates an added step in the process, as the game is originally conceptualized to work in tandem with those facilitators helping youngsters. Those facilitators, in themselves, are not the target demographic for the game and might require that facilitators be trained in media literacy and in Sexual Rights literacy, even though they had showed a deep and nuanced understanding about the sociocultural context within their areas of intervention, and raised several important points about the application of serious gaming to these communities.

Objectives: To understand how the need to train adult trainers to accompany youngsters in the usage of a serious game about Sexual Rights might create specific challenges to the conceptualization and implementation of the game. To understand how facilitators conceive of serious gaming as a pedagogic strategy and Sexual Rights as a topic.

Methodology: We used participant observation, reports from training sessions, and an analysis of the game's content to gather information about how trainers interacted with serious gaming.

Main conclusions: Facilitators were lacking in knowledge about several issues around Sexual Rights, and about how youngsters tend to interact with media, or with media literacy discussions. They held several stereotypes and beliefs about youngsters and technology, and about youngsters and sexuality. These results show the difficulties of accepting serious gaming as a valid pedagogic strategy and as a tool for promoting citizenship; they also show how serious gaming faces applicability problems that do not stem from technological aspects but from how the topics they cover are thought of.

Keywords: Serious gaming; Youth; Sexual Rights.