The Eu e os Outros[i] Project - a case study

Susana Henriques*, Ana Filipa Soledade**

*ISCTE – University Institute of Lisbon, CIES-IUL, Lisboa, Portugal
**IDT, I.P. (Portuguese Drug and Drug Addiction Institute, I.P.); CIID – IPL (Identities and Diversities Research Centre – IPL)

Abstract
This is a training project in personal and social skills in the form of an interactive game based on eight different online narratives. It takes place on a group level, under the supervision of a team using a set of instructions drafted in training and trial situations. The school environment is of special importance in prevention, due to its educational and information role, which encourages reflection and the ability to make choices that lead to good decisions and promote well being. This project is based on the global communication process in present-day network societies and shows us that the Internet is a precious tool in the teaching and learning process, where teenagers play an active role in their education.
This is an interactive online multimedia game for young people at school designed to respond to their values, interests and problems. The game and its stories use a recreational approach to stimulate creativity, learn[ii]ing and a reflexive discussion on topics affecting young people's everyday lives (e.g. adolescence, growing up, friendship, expectations, fears and doubts...). It also develops media literacy not only through the skills needed to play an online game but also the guided, supervised research that they have to do to work with the topics as they appear.
The case study was conducted with a group of students and we discuss the results related to issues of media literacy and the relationship between its theory and practice.

Keywords: Media literacy; online game; innovative educational practices; edutainment.

Introduction

Under an agreement between Instituto da Droga e da Toxicodependência, I.P. (Portuguese Drug and Drug Addiction Institute, IDT, I.P.) and Centro de Investigação Identidades e Diversidades (Identities and Diversities Research Centre) at Instituto Politécnico de Leiria (CIID / IPL), an action research project is currently assessing the test-phase implementation of *Eu e os Outros*. We will be presenting and discussing the results of this assessment in a case study. The test phase was conducted nationwide, though we will only show the results of the project in Leiria, within the scope of intervention of the Centro de Respostas Integradas (CRI, Integrated Response Centre) at IDT, I.P. Leiria and IPL / CIID.

Eu e os Outros is a countrywide project set up by the central services at IDT, I.P. and is associated with the youth website www.tu-alinhas.pt, which is a space for awareness and reflection on the issue of drugs and

---

[i] "Eu e os Outros" – or *Me and the Others*, referring to the complex relationships between teenagers in their growing-up process.

other areas related to growing up. The main goals are to foster health education, step up focus on a preventive approach, implement the project and see it continued by teachers as educators and socialisers and encourage students to engage in critical discussion and shared construction of knowledge and attitudes. Berger and McDougall (2010, sp) say, 'So, you can study Media and you can use Media to study Media. Or you can use Media to study something else entirely.' *Eu e os Outros* falls within the second option, i.e. it is a game associated with a website for working on different skills.

In this case study, we discuss the results achieved and relate them to the theory and practice of media literacy. We start by giving an overview of the project and its bases, guidelines and purposes. We then describe the methods used and conclude with a final reflection on the results

Media literacy and prevention

The *Eu e os Outros* Project is based on globalization processes in communication in today's network societies (Castells, 2002), showing that the Internet is a valuable tool in helping to teach and learn, in which the young people themselves play an active role in their education (Cardoso, Costa, Conceição & Gomes, 2005). This is a context based on shared communication codes that goes beyond technological expertise and is associated with forms of appropriation of and integration into everyday practices (Castells, 2002 and 2004). The young people reflexively, actively and critically develop civic participation skills, as the action-reflection in the game favours critical discussion and shared construction of knowledge and attitudes. It also takes advantage of the fact that they all have the abilities and skills they need to solve problems. At the same time as the young people are developing critical, analysis, evaluation and reflection competences from media contents, which is what defines media literacy for David Buckingham (2003), they are also acquiring other skills, such as the promotion of health.

'Health education can only achieve significant results if it is included in everyday school life and ceases to be an activity by certain teachers and some organizations outside school. This is why schools need to open up to the exterior...' (Sampaio as cited in DGIDC, 2007, p.10). A school setting is an excellent place for a preventive approach, thanks to its role in educating, informing, encouraging reflection and empowering young people to make decisions that lead to conscious choices and foster their wellbeing. This project is therefore a dynamic, interactive way of meeting education and health goals and promoting global citizenship skills.

In this context, we regard prevention as a 'level of technical and scientific intervention and, in general, it can be considered an active process of implementing initiatives aimed at changing and improving integral

education and quality of life and fostering personal and social skills with a view to public wellbeing' (Marques as cited in DGIDC, 2007, p.80).

This preventive intervention may take place at three levels of strategy: universal, selective and indicated, i.e. for all students, specific groups (classes or groups identified as having certain psychosocial vulnerabilities) or particular subgroups already demonstrating high-risk behaviours or signs of substance abuse, all of which require different approaches (Borges & Filho, 2004). Preventive intervention in the *Eu e os Outros* Project is universal and intended for all students, regardless of their individual risk level.

Its aim is training in personal and social skills using an interactive game based on eight different narratives. It involves group exploration of an online program under the supervision of a team of teachers on the basis of instructions worked on in a training context. The teachers, as stimulators, must be prepared to experience the challenges that they throw down and reflect on the basis of their own personal experiences (Melo, 2006). This preventive intervention at school must involve '... a comprehensive approach in a teacher-student relationship based on progressive mutual trust...' (Sampaio as cited in DGIDC, 2007, p.11). It must also entail improving people's health, well-being and quality of life, which in specific terms, means improving know-how and skills, fostering individual responsibility and developing social and community ties (Morel, A., Boulanger, M., Hervé, F., Tonnelet, G., 2001). According to the World Health Organization, individual life skills (Fernández et al., 2006:7) 'are the abilities to adopt a flexible and positive behaviour that allows the individuals to approach with effectiveness the requirements and challenges of the daily life. It is the personal, interpersonal, cognitive and psychological skills that allow people to control and to direct their lives, developing the capacity to live with their environment and to get changes in it'. Examples of these skills are decision making, critical thought, self-knowledge, a capacity for communication and interpersonal relationships and the ability to handle emotions and stress.

These skills are learned through practice, not abstractly. This is why learning them is known as training, on the following conditions: application to significant contexts (school in this case) and the use of interactive methods. Media literacy is therefore associated with other skills, which, here, are prevention, the promotion of health and general civic participation. In other words, the explosion of everyday information and knowledge has changed the school's role as a source of production and distribution of scientific knowledge and it now has to compete with the knowledge capital produced and sustained by the media (Tornero, 2007). The media have been forming a new cognitive and learning environment that, in our opinion, must be introduced into schools to create new climates for the perception and construction of knowledge and to generate new, relevant learning (idem).

In view of this scenario, it is necessary to foster critical, reflexive education on the main everyday problems for young people, i.e. school, the community, the country or the world. In this case study, the proposal is

to use the recreational and interactive potential of *Eu e os Outros* to introduce this critical and reflexive civic perspective.

The game approach

The use of a game as a preventive tool in *Eu e os Outros* takes the form of an intervention programme with a more or less defined time and sequence structure. This entails progressive access to contents or skills or ongoing work in a particular direction. Consistency in the intervention is achieved by plots that build bridges between each session, like chapters in a story. The game involves discovery, stories, a dynamic process and a greater ability to gain confidence and independence (Arez & Neto, 2000; Gee, 2005b).

The game approach using symbolic exercise and rules, in which the players are the protagonists, a theatrical game, and its recreational component are extremely important in psychological development and as a preventive strategy. These entertaining constructions involve an understanding of values, attitudes and representations associated with actions, contexts and time management in formal (school time) and informal (spontaneous or organised free time) daily routines. Although the game sometimes focuses on the subject, the development unit should be relational (Arez & Neto, 2000).

The project is based on the principles of interactive narrative and the assumption that the best way to find out how young people relate to any issue is in their own words, by analyzing their own narratives on the different phenomena in formal and informal spaces for conversation. This is how we rediscover space for full experience of risk, exploration and confrontation with the unexpected, while providing an opportunity for meeting and relating to the other (Melo, 2006).

This fosters reflection on attribution of meaning and the personal transaction processes involved in its construction. The reflection process is the moment at which each subject selects what they considered was most significant during the action, decides whether they can and want to share it with others, finds the right way to do so and then sees others' reactions. To do this, they elaborate on what was initially no more than a provoked experience and attribute meaning to it on the basis of previous experiences. This experience-based learning goes through a number of phases: experience of the game (what was it like?); reporting of feelings, emotions or reactions (how did they feel? what did they like most?); evaluation of performance (were they happy with the result of the game? was it what they expected?); exploration of contents (what do they feel was most important about the game? what does the game work?); and prospects of change (if they played again, what would they change?) (Gramigna, 1994).

The subjects share and exchange information, ideas and experiences while they play (Montgomery, Cortés, 2010). However, they also learn collaboratively and form a real learning community that transcends the

game time and is perpetuated in information, pastimes and chat rooms on the associated website.This thus reinforces strict, critical, creative articulation with the young people's everyday lives (Buckingham, 2007a). It is also a resource for their future because, as Gee (2005b:37) shows us, it creates a common sense of group driven by the shared experiences and "... such forms of affiliation are commonly demanded in modern workplaces".

Methodological orientations

Eu e os Outros is a health promotion project focusing on the prevention of drug abuse for students aged from 11 to 15 (3rd cycle of compulsory education).

Its implementation entails seven sessions per story or theme. The eight stories (with eight different themes and characters) have one central character per theme. There is a cross-reference between different dimensions in each of them with different viewpoints on the questions. Psychoactive substances are present in different stories to give an idea of diverse effects, contexts, use patterns, etc. These stories allow the students to put themselves in the other's place, identify with some issues and find clues as how to deal with problem situations. They can think about the questions raised in each story and, as they move forward, they have to make decisions that will affect how the story turns out.

The challenges and plots in the eight stories are related to the following themes - growing up, friends, family, love and passion, school, having fun, the future... and when justice isn't blind... Their driving forces are eight characters – Jamal, Catarina, Emanuel, João, Alice, Sabrina, Daniel and Maria, who were created by young people in terms of image, personality, social background, social representation of youth or urban tribal cultures – surfer, Goth, nerd, dread, fashion, preppy, foreigner, freak... (www.tu-alinhas.pt). This leads to an approach to the drug issue and requires reflection and decisions on the different challenges that they have to face.

The implementation method is as follows: classes in the 3rd cycle of compulsory education (students aged between around 11 and 15); two implementers (one acting as the 'game master'), one of whom is the class's teacher of an extra-curricular subject like civic education, projects or accompanied studies; a rotating decision chair in which each of the students has to try out different roles; a space for discussion and anticipation of the consequences when making decisions for the group; and additional answers to stimulate the group (to consolidate reflection on the questions addressed).

The articulation between the CIID and IDT, I.P. is provided by the Technical Support Group, whose role is to plan, monitor and evaluate. Where planning is concerned, the group helps to implement the project in the Leiria area (including training implementers). It acts as the link between the central service team and

the implementers and ensures articulation with local structures and best use of existing resources. Monitoring the implementation of the project is based on the needs felt by the group of implementers (planning and structuring sessions in accordance with each group's established work goals and helping the implementers to solve problem situations in the management of group dynamics). Assessment entails using the evaluation protocol for collecting and processing data and providing information on the project.

Our analysis takes the form of a case study, which is justified by the particularities of the group that played the game, which we will now describe in general terms. It was a class of twenty-one seventh-grade students at risk of dropping out. The group consisted of eleven boys and ten girls aged from 12 to 15. Eleven of them had failed a year at least once and eight were institutionalized (removed from their families by court decision). These young people's fathers were in poorly qualified occupations (electricians, carpenters, bricklayers, factory workers), consistent with their qualifications (only one had a degree). Eleven of their mothers did not work (eight were housewives and three were unemployed).

The central theme of the story was school, though it was also used to work other issues that were related or were brought up by the students during the game. The activities took place at school in the 2009/2010 academic year during civic education time (one of the extra-curricular areas mentioned above).

The subsequent evaluation was based on research-action procedures, in that the story was accompanied by training for the implementers. This was also the case because the results were recorded in observation and registration grids, which made it possible to make adjustments and improvements whenever necessary. Focus groups were also held with the implementers and students at different times – at the start, middle and end of the game – in order to pinpoint any changes in attitude to the game and behaviour with regard to the issues covered. 'Work with focus groups helps to understand the processes used in the construction of reality by certain social groups, to understand everyday practices, actions and reactions to facts and events, behaviours and attitudes. It is an important technique for a knowledge of representations, perceptions, beliefs, habits, values, restrictions, preconceptions, languages and symbols prevalent in the treatment of each question by people sharing some common traits that are relevant to the study if the problem in question' (Gatti, 2005, p.11). Critical discourse analysis was used on this information (Pedro, 1997; van Dijk, 2003 and 2005).

We will now present and discuss the results of these interviews.

Discussion of results and final reflection

In order to give a better idea of the specifics of the group analyzed, we will first look at the description given by each teacher / implementer. 'This group was a melting pot. There were seven foreign immigrants

- four from eastern Europe, two Brazilians and one African. Most of these young people were institutionalized or didn't live with their parents. All of them had already committed some minor crimes, used drugs or had bad results in school.' (A).

The content and form of educational transformation arises from the actions and contributions of the agents directly involved in the teaching and learning processes, mainly teachers and students, rather than from the result of directives from institutions, experts or manuals (Brockman, 2010). In other words, we feel that the teachers' actions were essential to this change and to the success of *Eu e os Outros* as a pedagogical resource that helps develop other, associated strategies. This is one of the questions that generate the greatest fear and insecurity.

As mentioned above, the central theme was school, though bullying issues were soon raised. The game is simple. Each story has a central theme involving a series of problem situations in which the young people have to take a position and make a decision on the character's attitude, thereby influencing the outcome of the narrative. The aspect that makes the game an innovative teaching resource is the potential arising from the use of each story, its characters or a situation that has already been identified by the group or that comes up during the game. It is precisely the fact that all the possibilities are open at the start that generates doubts and uncertainties. At the same time, this is where the game's great potential lies.

In other words, while we are working on a story, other parallel activities are going on in order to work certain skills identified as necessary during the game or from the characteristics of the group. This is the main reason why the implementers need to know the group well, because this is the only way that additional strategies will be appropriate and fruitful. An example.

"Some very interesting activities have been undertaken as a complement to the game. One of the pairs of implementers introduced a series of initiatives on bullying a propos of Story 3 with the central theme of school. '... We formed groups of three and each group had to research bullying on the internet. One of the groups tried to give a theoretic, conceptual overview of the phenomenon, another looked for measures taken to deal with the problem and the third searched for news items about bullying. Other activities were born from this first and ended up being extended to the whole school, because they talked to each other about it and other classes asked us questions, as their teachers, so that they could also work on bullying...'. They showed really interesting photos and assignments ..." (observation notes, October 2009)

This is why we included this game in media literacy, which is regarded as a set of activities that include different goals and comprehensive skills: youth and development, entrepreneurship, artistic self-expression, consumer education, citizenship education, health education and personal and social skills ... As Tyner (2010) claims, the uses of media literacy are diverse and have a potential for involvement that helps raise

new questions on goals, purposes and consequences at different levels and provides new bases for research into contemporary media literacy practices.

Using these contexts of intervention and stimulation of the game and analyzing the conversations in the focus groups, we found some evolution in the implementers and among the young people. This increase in motivation, involvement and change can be divided into three stages.

The first stage, which we have called 'difficulties and adaptation', is characterized by initial expectations, along with some resistance, doubts and even fear of something new. These attitudes are expressed in the following excerpts:

'In our first session we had some problems getting them to play the game and also some behaviour issues.' (A)

 'It was difficult to make them talk about themselves.' (A)

'At first I was embarrassed.' (M, 14)

 'I was suspicious about this game, because I had to share things about myself.' (F, 15)

'In the first session I didn't open my mouth. I couldn't understand what was going on.' (F, 12)

The game was something new and unexpected and, as it involved new conceptual frameworks and educative practices, it took them out of their comfort zones and generated resistance (Buckingham, 2007a). The dynamics of the game stimulated the young people's ability to consciously and reflexively make the most of opportunities, run risks, weigh consequences and make decisions. This was a new feature in their everyday lives and their relationship with the school and the group.

The second stage, 'acceptance and motivation' was identified in the focus groups somewhere in the middle of the process and showed changes of attitude in all participants, resulting in greater involvement and commitment to the game and the entire process of change.

'We were very surprised at the answer they gave us when we started to introduce additional dynamics to the main game.' (A)

'The progress that some of them demonstrated in terms of communication gave others the freedom they needed to start interacting better.' (A)

'I especially liked Jamal, because we don't usually see a cool black character.' (M, 13)

'It was cool to see a foreigner like me in the game.' (F, 13; M, 15; M, 15)

'It was cool to do the drama and the music. It made the game more fun.' (M, 14)

As the story and activities in the game progressed, the group experienced a process of apprehension and comprehension when they caught the edutainment of the message in the dynamics of interaction (Fontanella, 2004). There was development as a result of experiencing the '...world in contact with people and events and through the media' (Baccega, 1999, p.7).

The last stage identified in the focus groups at the end of the activities was 'evolution and new skills'.

'They often highlighted the importance of feelings and personal relationships.' (A)

'Overall, the game went pretty well. We realised that the group showed important progress in terms of behaviour and skills.' (A)

'It was easier to talk to my classmates. We got closer.' (M, 13)

'I started to think more about my decisions.' (F, 14)

'I think that there was less conflict between us because of this game.' (M, 14)

These excerpts show that the recreational experiences offered by the game indicate increasing engagement which would lead to new educative approaches. This type of significant learning must be active, as it involves the acquisition of skills during the activity, while taking opportunities, running risks and making choices. Furthermore, while it brings the players closer together through cooperation and the sharing of affinities, interests and goals, it provides spaces and opportunities for self-reflection (Gee, 2005a; Prensky, 2006; Buckingham, 2007b).

It was very interesting to see these youngsters from different cultures taking part in this game, reflecting on the same questions and enjoying themselves while acquiring skills. Their participation and engagement offered a valuable framework for new approaches to game-related issues (Livingstone, 2004). So, we find the game, at the same time, generic enough to be understood by youngsters from different cultural backgrounds and specific enough to be adjusted to the unique features of each player or group. There is a concern for ensuring a comprehensive approach that is significant to the students, regardless of age, gender, youth culture, school attainment or cultural and socio-demographic characteristics. It was also interesting to watch the teachers' acceptance and involvement grow, which is particularly important if we consider that they are the young people's socialising models (Ponte & Cardoso, 2008).

These aspects reflect innovative education and teaching practices that increasingly require the development of civic skills in a global context. Civic or citizenship skills are people's ability to adopt an attitude in a certain context of action at political, social, economic and cultural levels (Selwyn, 2003). Today's knowledge-based information societies require the population's active participation, which means developing new pedagogical approaches for their ongoing development. The *Eu e os Outros* Project constitutes a contribution in this field because, as we have shown, it is a technological resource that builds bridges between: different dimensions of the agents involved – individual, group, school, community and global; various aspects of the students' everyday lives – training in personal and social skills, promotion of health; and media literacy. It also helps to implement media literacy in a concrete practice with substantive results, thereby empowering young people as agents.

Bibliography

Arez, A., Neto, C. (2000). The study of independent mobility and perception of the physical environment in rural and urban children. In C. Neto (Ed.), *Play and Community – Proceedings of XIV 1999 IPA World Conference (sp)*. Lisbon, Edições CML.

Berger, R., McDougall, J. (2010). Media Education Research in the Twenty-first Century: Touching the Void?. *Media Education Research Journal, 1 (1), pp.7-17, London,* Auteur Publishing.

Baccega, M. (2007). A construção do campo Comunicação/Educação. *Comunicação & Educação,* vol. 5, no. 14, pp.7-16, São Paulo, Universidade de São Paulo (USP).

Borges, C., Filho, H. (Coords.) (2004). *Alcoolismo e Toxicodependência*. Lisbon, Climepsi Editores.

Brockman, J. (Ed.) (2010). *This will change everything: ideas that will shape the future*. New York, Harper Collins.

Buckingham, D. (2003). *Media Education: literacy, learning and contemporary culture*. Cambridge, Polity Press, Blackwell Publishing.

Buckingham, D. (2007a). *Beyond technology – children's learning in the age of digital culture*. Cambridge, Polity Press.

Buckingham, D. (2007b). Media Education Goes Digital – An Introduction. *Learning, Media and Technology, pp.*32:2, London, Routledge.

Cardoso, G., Costa, A. F., Conceição, C. P., Gomes, M. C. (2005). *A sociedade em rede em Portugal*. Porto, Campo das Letras.

Castells, M. (2002). *Sociedade em rede*. Lisbon, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Vol. I.

Castells, M. (2004). *A Galáxia Internet*. Lisbon, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian.

DGIDC – Direcção-Geral de Inovação e de Desenvolvimento Curricular (2007). *Consumo de Substâncias Psicoactivas e Prevenção em Meio Escolar*. Lisbon, DGIDC, DGS, IDT.

Fernández, R. et al. (2006). *ATLANTE – enfrentar o desafio das drogas*. Bilbao, Edex.

Fontanella, G. (2004). Anim(a)ção na Educação. O entre-entendimento na teia da produção do sentido e sua mediação na educação. *Actas do III SOPCOM, VI LUSOCOM e II IBÉRICO,* Vol. IV, pp.343-351, Covilhã, Universidade da Beira Interior.

Gatti, B. (2005). *Grupo Focal na pesquisa em Ciências Sociais e Humanas*. Brasília, Líber Livro Editora.

Gee, J. (2005a). W*hy video games are good for your soul*. Sydney, Common Ground.

Gee, J. (2005b). *Good videogames and good learning*. Phi Kappa Phi Forum, Vol.85, N°2, pp.34-37.

Gramigna, M. (1994). *Jogos de empresa e técnicas vivenciais*. São Paulo, Makron Books.

Livingstone, S. (2004). Media Literacy and the challenge of new information and communication Technologies. *The Communication Review*, 7, pp.3-14, Philadelphia, Routledge.

Melo, R. (2006). Brincar com a saúde – o brincar preventivo. *Revista Toxicodependências*, Vol. 12, no.2, pp.21-30, Lisbon, Edição IDT.

Montgomery, L., Cortés, C. (2010). 'The new media ecology – toward a taxonomy of the Web-based media'. *Journal of media literacy*, Vol. 57, Nos. 1 & 2, pp.15-17, Wisconsin, National Telemedia Council, Inc.

Morel, A., Boulanger, M., Hervé, F., Tonnelet, G. (2001). *Prevenção das toxicomanias*. Lisbon, Climepsi.

Pedro, E. (Org.) (1997). *Análise Crítica do Discurso*. Lisbon, Caminho.

Ponte, C., Cardoso, D. (2008). Generational gaps in internet use in Portugal at home and at school: implications for media literacy. Communication presented in section *Media Education and Research Section, XXVI, IAMCR Conference*, Estocolm, 20 to 25 de July. Retrieved from http://www2.fcsh.unl.pt/eukidsonline/docs/IAMCRCPDC.pdf

Prensky, M. (2006). *Don't bother me, mom – I'm learning!.* St Paul, Paragon House.

Selwyn, N. (2003). Finding a rule for ICT in citizenship education. *ITT Citized*, Newsletter 5, pp.12-13 , Canterbury, Citized.

Tornero, J. (Coord.) (2007). *Comunicação e educação na sociedade da informação*. Porto, Porto Editora.

Tyner. K. (Ed.) (2010). *Media Literacy*. London, Routledge.

Van Dijk, T. (2005). *Discurso, Notícia e Ideologia – estudos na Análise Crítica do Discurso*. Porto, Campo das Letras.

Van Dijk, T. (2003). The discourse-knowledge interface. In G. Weiss & R. Wodak (Eds.), *Critical Discourse Analysis. Theory and interdisciplinarity*, (pp.85-109). Houndsmills, Palgrave MacMillan.