

The World Power League

The World Power League is a web-based resource designed to stimulate young people to reflect on the concepts of citizenship and politics. Using the functionality of an online 'election' it invites users to consider how power is used in everyday life in both public and private, and to vote on how they would prefer it distributed.



Partners

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User testing of World Power League website

Outline

The World Power League is an exploratory user-centred research and development project, with the designers working closely with young people in order for their understandings and experiences to inform the application.

The website itself is designed as a fictional 'election', with candidates from around the world and across history pitted against each other in a competition to become the top of a global league of power. It is up to young people to vote for the figures who they think ought to lead the world, with such famous and infamous figures as George Bush or Madonna up against Sharon Osborne or Mahatma Gandhi in the candidacy.

The prototype has been developed by a small team of artists with support from Futurelab, and it contains the functionality to allow users to cast their votes and to see the results visualised on screen. Users can then analyse the results of their election according to gender, nationality, age, and by the type of power they possess. It makes visual and clear the political preferences of young users, allowing them to consider and discuss how the world would be, and who would possess its resources of power, if their votes could be counted and their voices heard.

The World Power League is intended as a playful, game-like resource for motivating young people's interest in the concept of politics. By juxtaposing figures well known in national and international politics with figures from popular culture, it aims to stimulate young people's conception of politics in broader ways. Filtering the results allows users to see who they as a group would prefer to see most powerful in domains such as politics, intellectual circles and finance, as well as media and sport, and to question how power is used in the modern world.

What sort of political influence, for instance, do pop stars possess? How do activists or scientists use their power? Why are some acts of power (such as declaring war) often tolerated, while other acts of power (such as inciting terrorism) condemned, and who by? Who is responsible for changing the lifestyles of the young, and what sorts of positive or negative effects do these people have? And who says so, and who agrees or disagrees? These are the sorts of questions that the World Power League aims to prompt young people to ask.

The website also contains the facility for young people to be able to insert themselves as candidates in the league. By writing themselves a short manifesto explaining how they would use their power, they are then able to see how well they would fare in a global competition for power.

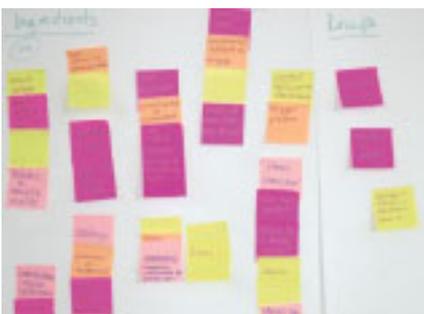
Research and Development

The project originators, Lucy Kimbell and Barby Asante, initially carried out a series of weekly workshops with 23 Year 10 students at a north London comprehensive school in 2005. During these sessions, students were involved in a number of conceptual, performance, art and discussion-based activities in order for specifications for the resource to be developed. It also allowed the developers to gain a greater awareness of how young people think about politics, and to engineer the resource to both engage them and to challenge their existing assumptions.

Subsequently, research trials were carried out on two sites by Futurelab and by Lucy and Barby; one trial at a semi-rural comprehensive in south Wales, and another at the north London school. In total, over 40 Year 10 students trialled the software in the context of other discussion activities, and were observed and interviewed. These trials confirmed the potential value of the resource in citizenship education. Many students enjoyed the election facility, and some reported great surprise at the results that emerged from a whole-class election. Their comments and observations of their use of it have informed further amendments and improvements.



Students selecting candidates



Workshop ideas

Next Steps

The World Power League prototype has the potential to be further developed. For example, schools could be able to download local versions of the league in order to be able to carry out closed elections amongst themselves. Leagues could be customised to feature global figures, national figures, members of local campaign groups, or even just students from the school, or could be engineered around one particular topical, cultural or popular issue, with all its protagonists featured in the candidacy. This would allow an individual school, year group or class to save the results of their league election and to analyse them according to their own political and cultural preferences.

It is also possible that with further development the resource could be used during school council elections, and for young people to promote awareness of specific issues of local politics and citizenship on which they feel strongly.

This idea was submitted to Futurelab's Call for Ideas programme by Lucy Kimbell and Barby Asante.

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