

World Power League

A project to engage 11-16 year-olds in citizenship and to stimulate thought on the political and democratic process



“The citizen can bring our political and governmental institutions back to life, make them responsive and accountable, and keep them honest. No one else can.”

John Gardner, American politician and social reformer

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Overview

Making citizenship real

Citizenship has been a statutory part of the National Curriculum for 11-16 year-olds since 2002, but it's generally agreed that there is a shortage of good digital teaching materials to use with this age group. Research suggests that teachers are finding it hard to engage young people in citizenship issues, because most of that age group feel alienated from the political process and believe that central government isn't interested in their views or concerns.

World Power League uses a web application to enable GCSE and other students to explore what is meant by citizenship, and what it means to be political. It shows that politics is not just about the Prime Minister or the Houses of Parliament but about the relationships between people in their daily lives.

Politics is about power – who has it, who doesn't have it and how it is used or abused



The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the World Power League website. The browser's address bar shows the URL: <http://www.worldpowerleague.org/gagan.php?name=W>. The website header features the logo "THE WORLD POWER LEAGUE" in a stylized font. On the left side, there is a navigation menu with links: [home](#), [about](#), [help](#), [join](#), [find out more](#), and [i'm not happy](#). The main content area is titled "You chose:" and displays a profile for Wangari Maathai. The profile includes a small portrait of her, her name, a description of her as a "Challenged 2 times. Won 2, level 0.", and her type of power as "Political". Below this, there is a section titled "Click again:" which features two more profiles. The first profile is for Larry Page and Sergey Brin, described as "Co-founders of Google", with their type of power listed as "Media". The second profile is for Kareena Kapoor, described as "Bollywood actress", with her type of power listed as "Media". At the bottom of the page, there is a button that says "VIEW THE WORLD POWER LEAGUE".

Context

Engaging young people in citizenship



Because children cannot vote until the age of 18, they often feel that what happens in government has nothing to do with them

The aim of citizenship education, as defined in the 1998 Crick Report, is to provide “moral and social development”, encourage “community involvement” and develop students’ “political literacy”.

The new curriculum was introduced in recognition of the fact that young people are often uninformed about current affairs and unaware of how government works, at either a central or local level.

It was hoped that citizenship education would be a way of engaging students in the political process and encouraging them to become more active citizens. By understanding more about the democratic process, students would feel less disenfranchised and more willing to play a part in democratic institutions.

According to the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) website, citizenship education aims to enable students to:

- become informed citizens, aware of their rights, responsibilities and duties
- play an effective role in relation to their local, national and international communities.

In practice, the requirements of the curriculum mean that the teaching of citizenship often focuses on the political processes relating to government and government institutions – in other words, Politics with a capital P.

Because children cannot vote until the age of 18, they often feel that what happens in government has nothing to do with them. Additionally to many young people, politics only means party politics. Although young people are often interested in single issues such as fox hunting or youth violence, they may not see these as political issues.

The idea behind this learning resource was to help students understand politics in the context of power. We wanted to enable students to make distinctions between different kinds of power and to see how power affects people in their daily lives.

The ingredients

How we got there

The idea for World Power League came from two artists, Barby Asante and Lucy Kimbell, who submitted it through Futurelab's Call for Ideas programme. They worked together with Futurelab to develop it into an effective learning resource. First of all, it was necessary to find out what got students energised about citizenship – what made them excited and interested.

Aims

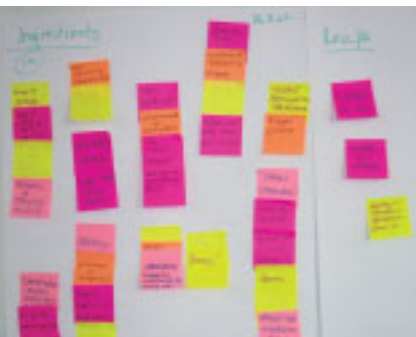
The project focused on two key questions:

1. How can the application enable young people to reflect on their own social, economic and political decisions?
2. How do young people think about citizenship and political acts, and how can they represent them?

“It’s about getting them to think about how they as individuals or groups could get involved in changing things. Most of them think they don’t have any say whatsoever,” says Futurelab researcher Ben Williamson.



“Most young people think they don’t have any say whatsoever”



This gave young people a chance to display their opinions about current political parties

Initial research

At the outset of the project, artists Barby Asante and Lucy Kimbell carried out six workshops, one a week, with 21 Year 10 students and their citizenship teacher from a community school in north-west London, in which they developed ideas for the website. These included discussions in which students had to take a point of view and decide where they stood (literally) in relationship to particular issues.

For example, in a discussion about immigration, students had to stand in one corner if they agreed completely with the statement, 'This country's borders should be completely open to immigrants' and in another corner if they disagreed completely. They then had to elaborate on the reasons why they had chosen to stand in a specific place.

The students were also asked to think about what an ideal world leader would look like. This gave them a chance to display their opinions about current political parties and to imagine a world leader who shared their concerns and interests.

In another exercise, the students looked at where power was concentrated, first by marking institutions of power on a map of the UK, and then by carrying out the same exercise on a map of their school.

We talked to the students about the relationship between politics and power. "Some of the most powerful and influential people are not political," says Asante.

We also talked about what different kinds of power can and can't achieve. "Michael Owen is a great role model, but what he can't do is take on the London bomb suspects or the fox hunting issue," says Williamson.

Initial outcomes

From these workshops the team learnt two key things about the students' views:

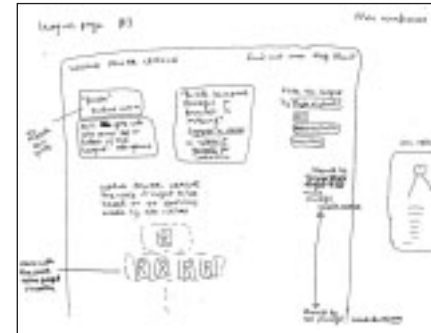
1. Students are interested in single issues. For example, they want to eradicate poverty, they want the troops out of Iraq and they don't want to have to pay university top-up fees.
2. Students felt that they were absolutely powerless.

Design

At the end of the six workshops, a paper prototype was produced. The team wanted to develop something that built on young people's interest in voting (like, for example, TV programmes such as Big Brother) by involving them in a fun form of democracy, in which they could cast their votes and see how much they shared consensus as a group on particular issues.

We came up with the idea of a 'world power league' in which students could vote for people they wished had more power, and people they wished had less.

The prototype was then taken back to the school for feedback from the same group of students. From that, the team was able to design a web application for the students to try out.



We wanted to develop something that built on young people's interest in voting (like Big Brother)



It was important to include a 'powerless' category, because this was how many students viewed themselves

How it works

The web application works by devising a league table of 'powerful' people – a 'power league'. It uses a database of approximately 100 famous people who might popularly be regarded as powerful, including politicians, celebrities, sports people, religious leaders and heads of state. The list includes historical figures as well as living people.

When drawing up the profiles, nine categories of power were taken into account:

- political
- financial
- attractiveness
- media
- spiritual
- sport
- physical
- intellectual
- powerless

It was important to include a 'powerless' category, because this was how many students viewed themselves. Users could create profiles of themselves too, with a brief description of who they are and an online manifesto. These profiles are then entered into the database to be voted on.

When a user comes to the site, two people are randomly taken from the database, and the user has to vote for which one they'd prefer to have more power. The vote takes immediate effect, with the votes being counted and the position of the individuals in the power league adjusted accordingly. A Google internet search engine link enables students to look up information on people they may not know.

Users can view the rankings in the power league to see whether their views on who should be most powerful coincide with the views of other people.

They can also apply four filters to the power league, to rank the results by:

- type of power
- gender
- year of birth
- country

The web application includes a page discussing different theories of power, including Nietzsche's idea that the "will to power" is inherent in human nature, and Foucault's idea that belief systems are used to persuade people to accept the power of authority figures.

"This is the kind of tool that can get young people to think about their place in the power structure, and how they can use their voices to campaign or protest," says Williamson.





Trials were carried out just after the 7 July bombings in London so there were real-life political issues with which the students could engage

Trials

The trials of the prototype were carried out at two schools: a community school in north-west London and a comprehensive school in south Wales. The trials at the London school were carried out over two mornings with the same class that had had input into the original design. The Welsh trial, in which 21 Year 10 students took part, was conducted over one day. The idea was to make sure that World Power League was used by two very different groups of students – one from the inner city, and one from a rural area far from the traditional UK seat of power.

The trials were carried out in 2005, just after the 7 July bombings in London, the announcement of the successful London Olympics bid, the G8 summit and Live 8. It was at a time when there were plenty of real-life political issues with which the students could engage.

The trial in Wales, led by Ben Williamson, was divided into three parts.

Trials: Part 1

We began by asking students to think about power, using questions such as:

- Who is the most powerful person in the world? Why? What sort of power does this person have?
- Who is most powerful person in UK? Why? What sort of power does this person have?
- What different sorts of power can you identify?

The students were shown pictures of some 'powerful' people, asking them to respond to these questions:

- What sorts of power do these people have?
- How do they use it?
- What do you think of how they use it?

Students then played World Power League for 20 minutes, after which they gathered in groups of three or four to discuss the top five candidates the class had voted for, and whether they agreed with those five choices.

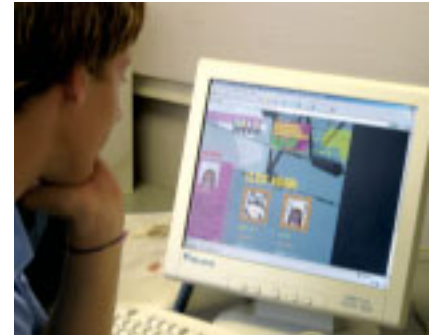
A whole-class discussion then took place, in which the students looked at the power league as a whole. Students were asked to respond to the questions:

- What sorts of power does the class prefer?
- What sort of world would we live in if the most powerful people in the world were the five or so that you have voted for?

Trials: Part 2

Students were asked to create their own personal profile for World Power League, and to write a short manifesto that described what they would do if they were in a powerful position.

This was followed by semi-structured group interviews.





Trials: Part 3

Students played World Power League again, but were able to vote for their classmates as well as the famous people already in the power league. They were also encouraged to nominate other famous people and to draw up short manifestos for them.

The researcher led a whole-group discussion, inviting students to talk about which of their classmates were getting the most votes in the power league, and why.

Students were asked to use filters such as gender, nationality and age, so that they could identify, for example, the most powerful women in the power league, or the most powerful person under the age of 20.

Evaluating the trials

Three methods were utilised to find out what students thought of the application:

- two students were chosen as case studies at the beginning of the day, and were filmed (with their consent) throughout the day, as they played with the application and took part in discussions
- all students who attended the small group interviews were recorded on audio cassette
- at the end of the trial, students were asked to complete a questionnaire about the application.

The aim of using three different evaluation methods was to capture both qualitative data (the students' emotional and intellectual response to the resource) and quantitative data (the number of students who liked it, who found it easy/difficult to use and who thought it was successful in making them think about power).

Findings

The students were largely enthusiastic about World Power League: in Wales, the majority of the students found it “really interesting” or “quite interesting”. Most of them also found it easy to use.

The results of playing the power league stimulated some interesting discussions. After the trial day in Wales, the ‘winners’ (those the class thought should have more power) were, in order: Nelson Mandela; Bill Gates; Martin Luther King; the Virgin Mary; and, in joint fifth place, Tony Blair and George Bush.

Students were often surprised to find that their peers had very different ideas from themselves about who should and shouldn’t have more power. As one girl said: “I’d never really looked at that kind of thing before, to see what people think in relation to me.”

Many students found it notable that none of the top six were entertainers or sports people. They also realised how well informed many of their peers were about politics and how strongly they felt about issues of power.

There was a clear change in students’ attitudes once they were able to write their manifestos and vote for each other. Some wrote serious manifestos (“I will work to end all religious, racial and stereotypical hatred in the world”) while others were more flippant (“I will give everyone in poorer countries free pieces of cheese if they vote me world leader”). The nature of the voting also changed, with some students tending to play the power league as a popularity contest.

On the whole, the resource was successful in engaging students’ interest in some difficult ideas. In particular, they seemed to enjoy the light-hearted approach to a serious subject.

“I’d never really looked at that kind of thing before, to see what people think in relation to me”

“I will work to end all religious, racial and stereotypical hatred in the world”

The future

At the end of the trials there remained some difficulties and concerns:

- World Power League does not use photographs of real people: there are placeholders where the photos should be. This is because photographs are copyrighted and licensing them for reuse is expensive.
- There are reservations about allowing students to nominate themselves in the power league. It works well in a single school context but, when it is on the internet, outsiders will not know who they are voting for.
- Funds need to be sought for an administrator for the site in order to ensure its longevity.

Further information is available on Futurelab's showcase, www.futurelab.org.uk/showcase/world_power_league.

The team thinks that World Power League could prove a useful learning resource, not just for citizenship teachers, but for teachers of other subjects where power is discussed, such as sociology or history. Although the application was originally designed for use with GCSE students, it is thought that it would also work well with children in the 11-14 age group.

The team and our partners

Ideally further work would be carried out with schools to refine the resource. New functionality for consideration includes:

- the ability to add extra detail to the profiles submitted by users
- a discussion board in which users can post thoughts about the issues raised by the power league
- the ability for users to edit their own profiles
- the ability to see the impact of a particular group on the power league; for example, how have the voting patterns from one school changed the positions of people in the power league?
- the use of text messages or e-mails to send updates to users about whether they have moved up or down in the power league.

Partnership was key to this project, enabling the combination of diverse skills that could address all aspects of this learning resource. Key partners include:

- Lucy Kimbell, artist/interaction designer
- Barby Asante, artist
- Ben Williamson, Futurelab
- George Grinsted, software designer
- Rachel Collinson, software designer

Futurelab would also like to thank the teachers and students at the schools that took part in the trials for their help.



Futurelab is passionate about transforming the way people learn. Tapping into the huge potential offered by digital and other technologies, we are developing innovative learning resources and practices that support new approaches to education for the 21st century.

Working in partnership with industry, policy and practice, Futurelab:

- incubates new ideas, taking them from the lab to the classroom
- offers hard evidence and practical advice to support the design and use of innovative learning tools
- communicates the latest thinking and practice in educational ICT
- provides the space for experimentation and the exchange of ideas between the creative, technology and education sectors.

A not-for-profit organisation, Futurelab is committed to sharing the lessons learnt from our research and development in order to inform positive change to educational policy and practice.

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