This is the accepted version of a paper presented at *ECER - European College of Educational research, Cadiz, Spain, 17-21 September, 2012.*

Citation for the original published paper:


N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

Permanent link to this version:
http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:oru:diva-26518
What do Wii teach in PE?

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Conference:
ECER 2012, The Need for Educational Research to Champion Freedom, Education and Development for All

Network:
18. Research in Sports Pedagogy
Format: Paper

In society, video- and computer games are often pointed out as risk factors in relation to physical inactivity, sedentary behaviour as well as increasing levels of obesity. At the same time, computers are an important source of knowledge where IT-competence and IT-experience provide pronounced advantages in society.

In the middle of this paradox a new type of videogames is introduced, where body movement and physical activity constitute the central element. These games, so called exergames or active video games, are games where physical movement is involved in the game through the use of for example balance-boards, step-up boards and dance-pads. Exergames are now more and more put forward in several countries as interesting tools to use in physical education in order to stimulate young people to be physically active.

In a recent review and synthesis of research on video games and health, Papastergiou (2009) strongly argues that videogames can offer “potential benefits as educational tools for Health Education and Physical Education, and that those games may improve young people’s knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours in relation to health and physical exercise” (Papastergiou, 2009, p 603). However, Vander Schee and Boyles (2010) argue that exergames rather should be seen as a body pedagogy producing certain narrow meanings about health, and that the uncritical implementation of exergames in school is a problematic way to place commercial products in school. Consequently, there are differences in views regarding exergames in educational settings that are worth paying attention to in research about people’s learning about the body, physical activity and health.

The aim of this paper is to investigate how images of the human body are expected to be learned when using exergames.

The use of artifacts – physical objects made by humans – is a central part of human life. In fact, there are many activities that would not be possible to perform without the use of them. In schools, students learn to use paper and pencils, computers, vaulting-horses, footballs and so on. How and why artifacts are supposed to be used in educational settings is however not given beforehand (Cuban 1986). The use of artifacts mediates certain meanings about the view of learning and the goals and choices of content in education (Almqvist 2005, Quennerstedt et al in 2012).
In this paper, we will use discourse analytical strategies in order to analyse how meanings about the body are expected to be learned when playing exergames. The discourse analytical strategies involve an interest in how processes of discourse constitute how we experience or relate to ourselves as well as our environment (Laclau & Mouffe 1985). Discourses constitute what is possible to say or do as partial and temporal fixations (Foucault 1980). These fixations are imbued with power, values and ideologies. As Evans and colleagues argue: “…health beliefs, perceptions and definitions of illness are constructed, represented and reproduced through language that is culturally specific, ideologically laden and never value free” (Evans et al 2008 p 46).

Method

To investigate what these games offer we have explored the manuals, the content, the animations of the games as well as the instructions and comments offered during gameplay. The empirical material consists of exergames most commonly used in schools: Wii fit and Wii sports (sports active). In the discourse analysis we have explored what is taken for granted in the empirical material in relation to other possible ways to argue. In this way we can explore what is included and excluded in the games and what is possible to think and act in relation to statements concerning the body.

Expected Outcomes

The analysis shows how the logic of the game, its animations, instructions and feedback to the player, constitutes the ideal body as a physically active, well-balanced, slim and strong body. The use of the game, the balance board and the hand control, makes it possible to measure and register how the player follows this logic. The analysis also shows how the way the player is supposed to learn about the body is strongly influenced by behaviorism. In the paper we argue that this way of learning about the body is narrow and limited and that it is important to critically discuss the effects of the use of these games in schools.

References


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