



DIOGENES PROJECT

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IO 1 - Digital storytelling laboratories to stimulate critical thinking on the issue of Gender Stereotypes

AGENFAP

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INTRODUCTION

Diogenes Project aims at promoting – in particular through innovative and integrated approaches – **gender equality, non-discrimination and social inclusion**.

Specifically, the project goal is to address the difficulty that students have to activate information processing in a critical way, regarding a sensitive topic as gender equality. Moreover, it aims to promote- in particular through innovative integrated approaches - **shared values, equality, social inclusion, diversity and non-discrimination**.

To achieve the above-mentioned objectives, the project is going to firstly develop IO1 - Digital storytelling laboratories to stimulate critical thinking on the issue of Gender Stereotypes.

1. STEREOTYPES

Gender stereotypes are the beliefs that people have about the characteristics of males and females. A gender stereotype is harmful when it limits women's and men's capacity to develop their personal abilities, pursue their professional careers, and/or make choices about their lives.

Stereotypes about gender influence children's perception of themselves and their behaviour towards others. In a learning environment, gender bias can affect the child's academic and social experience. This can have a strong impact on their future decisions, opportunities and career choices.

Not all gender stereotypes are negative, but they tend to be prejudicial. Negative gender stereotypes are often translated into laws and policies that create harm to women in everyday life. The CEDAW Committee reported that the outcome of this gender bias on the mental and physical integrity of women deprives them of the equal enjoyment of their fundamental rights.

For this reason, gender bias is detrimental when it restricts women's and men's chance to build their personal abilities, make their own choices and pursue their own professional careers.

The perpetuation of gender stereotypes will keep justifying gender discrimination, reinforcing a structural and historical pattern of discrimination. In a school environment, they can affect a young person's classroom experience, academic performance, subject choice, and well-being.

Challenging gender stereotypes might help close the gender gap. The removal of gender stereotypes in children's learning and playing environments helps children to develop to their full potential. They no longer absorb potentially harmful stereotypes that could become the basis for gender-based violence later in life. Gender stereotypes discourage children from engaging in activities they might otherwise enjoy and excel at, limiting their development and choices later in life. This disproportionately disadvantages girls and women.

1. Family

Parents and family play a pivotal role in shaping children's views on gender, being the child's primary environment and source of information in the first years of life. From the very beginning of a child's life, their gender affects the parent practices exhibited by the child's parents. Parents frequently pass their own gender beliefs to their children, showing different expectations for girls and boys.

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Views about men's responsibilities as "breadwinners" maintain discriminatory gender norms around housework and childcare. According to the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, misconceptions about women's roles in the family contribute to a division of labour within households, which often results in poverty and a lower level of education for women.

1.1 Stereotypes

- By dressing their daughters in pink clothing and sons in blue, parents perpetuate the 'blue is for boys, pink is for girls' myth. In fact, babies of both sexes show a preference for blue. Preferences for pink by females emerge later, around the age of 2 when children begin to become aware of societal gender norms.
- Parents have higher expectations of their male children than of their daughters, from as early as infancy. This can be seen in the estimations of mothers on the crawling abilities of their infants. Boys and girls showed no measurable disparity in motor abilities, however mothers consistently over-estimated their sons' skills and underestimated those of their daughters.

1.2 Suggestions

- The government should implement public information and education programmes to change attitudes concerning the role of women in our society.
- The government should address gender stereotypes that impair equality in marriage and in family relations. Possible measures include the implementation of comprehensive policy and awareness-raising initiatives aimed to overcome stereotypical attitudes about the role of women in the family. This means creating a process which facilitates the exchange of ideas and improves mutual understanding, developing competencies and skills necessary for societal change.

2. Friends and peer influence

Development studies on gender discrimination confirm that gender inequality comes from the closest environment, including friends and school. Peer relationships have a strong impact on how children view the roles of males and females in our society. **Gender stereotypes begin within the family but are further reinforced by a child's peer group.**

The nature of interactions between children and toys is strongly linked with the stereotypes associated with each gender. It is common for children to influence each other's actions, even in choosing or not a specific toy. Therefore, removing gender stereotypes from toys should be a priority for families and educational institutions.

LEGO financed a study analysing how toys influence future opportunities and career choices.

"There's asymmetry," said Prof Gina Rippon, a neurobiologist and author of *The Gendered Brain*. "We encourage girls to play with 'boys' stuff' but not the other way around."

This was a problem since toys offered "training opportunities", she said. "So, if girls aren't playing with Lego or other construction toys, they aren't developing the spatial skills that will help them in later life. If dolls are being pushed on girls but not boys, then boys are missing out on nurturing skills."

2.1 Examples

- Orientation choice: A boy enrolling in a home economics course may feel uncomfortable if he is the only boy in the class. Similarly, when a young woman chooses to study at a higher educational institution where there are many boys, she may feel like an outsider because she is taking on a role that many in her environment consider inappropriate.

3. Educational Environment

The educational environment plays a key role in challenging gender norms in order to empower women, but it can also reinforce them if education policies and the entire system are not based on the principle of gender equality. UNESCO reports that, of children who are identified as being at risk of never attending school, three-quarters are girls. Gender inequalities persist in education in terms of subject preferences and performance, and in cultural aspects of the education and training experience. The role of teachers is crucial, with children viewing teachers as role models, especially during the foundational years of children's education. **When teachers fall prey to social biases on gender, this will be reflected in their attitude and behaviour towards their students.**

Social gender norms manifest themselves through the conditioning of girls to not participate in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Maths subjects. This is the so-called STEM gap, which results in a lifelong impact on career choices for women, a gender-based digital divide, and a large-scale economic impact.

3.1 Stereotypes

- Studies show that by age 6, girls are both less likely to believe that members of their gender are “really, really smart”, and accordingly begin to avoid activities they consider to be for “really, really smart” children. This is closely linked to the so-called ‘STEM gap’ and the belief that boys naturally excel more than girls in empirical sciences and mathematics. These false views undermine girls’ interest and confidence in mathematics-intensive fields.
- Gendered school uniforms reinforce norms that girls should wear skirts or dresses and boys should wear pants/trousers. In some school’s girls are asked to wear pink shirts, while boys wear white, further differentiating the two genders, and establishing pink as a ‘girls’ colour’. Gendered school uniforms are shown to operate to the disadvantage of girls. Girls’ uniforms are on average more expensive than male ones, sexualise young girls through modesty provisions applied only to female students, and limit girls’ physical activity. Girls as young as five have been targeted by such modesty policies, highlighting girls as future sexual objects, in contrast to their male peers.

3.2. Suggestions

- The government can implement programmes to encourage girls to pursue education and employment outside fields commonly associated with women, such as the humanities.
- Gender-sensitive planning and budgeting, which aims to ensure that investments in the education field advance gender equality.
- Gender mainstreaming within the education administration. This includes building the capacity of all staff in ministries of education on gender issues at all levels. It may also involve increasing the representation of women in senior positions in ministries of education.

4. Leisure time

4.1 Toys and games

Toys influence children's views of gender from the earliest stages of life. Parents, other family members, and friends help to reinforce gendered play by buying children toys traditionally associated with the child's gender. This serves to limit children's interests and preferences from an early stage. As different toys teach different skills, limiting children's play to traditional toys for their gender limits their skill development.

4.1.1 Examples

- Boys are often given toys such as guns to play with and encouraged to participate in physical, and often more aggressive, activities with other boys or male caregivers, which can promote unhealthy expressions of masculinity. Girls are given dolls in expectation of their future role as mothers.
- The limiting effect of 'girls' toys' vs. 'boys' toys' is further reinforced by a trend of 'pinkwashing' toys. A comparison of toy catalogues from 1976 and 2015 showed that toys which have been considered stereotypically female, are now overwhelmingly being produced in shades of pink, compared to previous decades where they came in a vast array of colours. This 'pinkwashing' amplifies the message that those toys are the ones girls should be playing with, and further excludes boys who have internalised the message that boys can't like pink.
- Video games largely exclude girls and women or depict them as objects of male desire. Female video game characters are five times more likely than male ones to have some level of nudity and there are four times as many male characters than female.

4.2 The Media

The role that women play in the media is influenced by existing social and cultural norms, including stereotypes. Media plays a powerful role in our society, thus, stereotyped images of women can undermine progress made on gender equality. Although in recent years the number of women working in the media has increased, the top positions, such as executives and chief editors, are very male dominated. The Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) points out that female journalists are more likely to be assigned 'soft' subjects such as family, lifestyle, fashion, and arts. The 'hard' news, politics and the economy, is much less likely to be written or covered by women. The media can also be an important factor in the promotion of gender equality, providing positive role models, as there are often channels dedicated entirely to children.

4.2.1 Examples

- Women are more likely to participate or be the host of TV shows, instead of news programmes.
- In TV shows or other programmes women are often portrayed solely as homemakers and carers of the family, dependent on men, or as objects of male attention.

4.2.2 Suggestions

- Giving out awards for non-stereotypical portrayal of women. For example, the "B&T Women in Media Awards", which celebrates exceptional women who have achieved success in their professional lives.

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- Creation of a database of female experts across different fields, who can be contacted for news appearances or contributions to other similar programmes.
- Training courses aimed at raising the awareness of media professionals to the gendered nature of information and the media.

4.3 Fairy tales

Classic fairy tales have been used by parents to teach and influence their children for hundreds of years. Fairy tales are often used to teach lessons and can be an important tool to provide little girls with new and more diverse role models. Girls are most often portrayed as passive and indoors, waiting for Prince Charming to come and save them. Boys, on the contrary, are active and experience a lot of things outside the house.

4.3.1 Examples

- *Snow white*: The story of “Snow White” presents the titular character and her stepmother as rivals. “It is a patriarchal frame that takes the two women’s beauty as the measure of their (self)worth, and thus defines their relationship as a rivalry”. By teaching young girls that their only worth is their appearance, and that a less attractive woman is a rival who will want to hurt them, the story enforced the ideas in the girls of the time that the only things that mattered were appearance and innocence.
- *Cinderella*: This fairy tale portrays women as people who cannot defend themselves. Thus, they wait for a male figure to rescue them. Moreover, the females in this fairy tale are associated with the housework. Cinderella does all the housework and does not worry herself about the outside world. Beauty also plays a prominent role in this fairy tale. If you are beautiful, you get married to a handsome prince.
- Princesses must be rescued by a prince.
- Fairies are female.
- Witches are bad, therefore are ugly: this reinforces the idea that women must be beautiful to be “good”.

4.3.2 Suggestions

- The creation of books which challenge male and female stereotypes, as well as the idea that there are girls’ and boys’ things. For example: “Angus all Aglow” by Heather Smith, a story about a little boy who enjoys sparkly things and has a special ability to hear him. Angus loses this ability when his classmates tease him for wearing his grandmother’s sparkly necklace. Another good example is “Fred Gets Dressed” by Peter Brown. This story depicts a young boy who tries on his parents’ clothes, ultimately preferring his mother’s dresses to his father’s clothes. In the end, the whole family joins in the game of dress-up.

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5. Appearance, body confidence, and mental health

5.1 Research

Physical appearance and sex are sources of gender stereotype attributions. When making assumptions about the physical appearance of a man or woman, the individual makes use of various stereotypes, and according to these stereotypes, categorises each based on their physical appearance.

Unrealistic beauty standards and the pressure to conform to a traditional physical look can have a negative influence on children's self-perceptions, leading to body image issues, mental health problems, and self-harm. Among both boys and girls, it can also lead to unhealthy eating habits and disorders.

5.2 Examples

- Girls are praised for being pretty or cute while boys are told they are strong or smart.
- Girls may be expected to have long hair and wear make-up, whilst boys have short hair and are expected to be taller and more muscular.

5.3 Suggestions

Advertising and marketing can be a force for change as they can use their power to dismantle gender stereotypes and promote positive gender portrayals. Marketing campaigns can avoid using standard physical looks, such as showing boys with long hair and girls with short hair. As a result, children and teenagers will have the freedom to be able to express themselves rather than have to conform to traditional appearances. Those children who also do not fit into the categories will also feel more at ease since they will see themselves reflected in society.

6. Gender-sensitive language

6.1 Research

In many cases unconscious cultural stereotypes will be expressed through the language we use, meaning people use these expressions even when they do not hold these assumptions.

A study dug into 25 different languages to assess how the gender stereotypes embedded in language can undermine efforts to promote gender equality across science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) careers.

Researchers found that the language we speak strongly predicts implicit [gender associations](#). According to the authors, linguistic associations may affect people's implicit judgments of women's abilities. For instance, "*The results suggest that if you speak a language that is really biased then you are more likely to have a gender stereotype that associates men with career and women with family.*"

6.2 Stereotypes

- The assumption that all company directors are men and all secretaries are women.
- The word "woman" often appears in texts close to "home" and "family," whereas "man" is frequently paired with "job" and "money."
- A job title that links the job to a single sex when either sex can perform the job. Ex. fireman, mailman, policeman.

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6.3 Suggestions

Gender-neutral language can look awkward or result in grating constructions; however, it is possible to use it gracefully and unobtrusively.

For instance, when using pronouns, it is possible to choose the one that seems most natural in the context.

EX: when using a singular adjective like “each” or “every,” avoid using a pronoun:

Sentence with masculine pronoun: Each student must hand in his homework on Thursday.

Gender-neutral form: Each student must hand in the assigned homework on Thursday.

Adjectives with gender connotations to avoid

Adjectives commonly used for women (derogatory)	Better language
Bossy or pushy	Assertive
Loose	Having sexual confidence –no male equivalent
Emotional or hormonal	Passionate, enthusiastic, empathetic
Ditzy	Silly
Frigid	Lacking sexual responsiveness –no male equivalent
Frumpy	Dowdy and old fashioned
Shrill	High pitched, grating voice
Hysterical	Irrational

List of Stereotypes:

- Men are breadwinners; women are homemakers.
- Pink is for girls; blue is for boys.
- Women cook and clean; men fix things and mow the lawn.
- Moms are permissive; dads are strict.
- Skirts or dresses are for girls; pants/trousers are for boys.
- Maths and science are for boys; literature and art are for girls.
- Girls and boys can't play together.
- Assertive women are 'bossy'; men are 'leaders'.
- Princesses have to be rescued by a prince, such as Snow White and Cinderella.
- Fairies are female.
- Dolls, makeup, dress-up, and playing pretend are for girls; sports, swords and guns, cars, gadgets, and building toys are for boys.
- Company directors are male; secretaries are female.

- Doctors are male; nurses are female.

2. CRITICAL THINKING

In the times of ‘fake-news’ and seemingly endless flood of less than reliable information, emphasis on critical thinking has become an important feature of education policy around the world. This emphasis is built on the idea that students need to become more systematic and critical in their thinking so that they can interpret, evaluate, and analyze the information they are confronted with; both in their studies as well as in their private lives.

Perhaps the most important feature of critical thinking is to be able to self-regulate one’s thought – to think about *how* one is thinking and, even more importantly *why* one is making judgments on different issues. Thus, critical thinking is a valuable competence in the modern world in which knowledge of our thinking processes and skills to apply certain techniques come together with the attitudes and values of being open minded and believing in facts. A critical person tries to look at an issue from as many angles as possible before she forms an opinion or makes a judgement. In other words, a critical person tries to find ways not to succumb to prejudices.

We use stereotypes in our everyday communication. We will never fully get rid of stereotypes in how we communicate information about other people. Quite often they are used in a humorous and lighthearted context, but unfortunately their use is usually unwarranted and even harmful.

Stereotypes are prejudicial in nature which partly explains why critical thinking is so important in battling unjustified stereotyping. Stereotypes can be harmful to the individuals we group together under the heading of a particular stereotype by assigning to them specific characteristics. They can also be harmful to the people using them in the sense that their use hinders true understanding of other people, as we fail to see them as individuals. Gender stereotypes are a prime example of how the harm can go ‘both ways’, i.e., harming the individual the stereotype is aimed against and the user (the person expressing the stereotype) herself.

Critical thinking is the best way to dismantle stereotypes and be on guard for prejudicial and unjustified references to them. First, critical thinking allows us to understand how rhetorical devices are used in our communication. Stereotyping is one of the most potent of such devices and widely used. Secondly, stereotyping can potentially be a part of a logical fallacy one needs to recognize. Although critical thinking is about more than identifying logical fallacies, being able to identify such fallacies is an important part of becoming a critical person. Lastly, the use of stereotypes is also a heuristic or a ‘mental shortcut’, which saves us from going through laborious thought processes. Critical persons have developed the attitude not to shy away from such processes and fall too easily in the pattern of these shortcuts.

2.1 Students and Teaching Critical Thinking

Reading through the literature on critical thinking, one soon realizes that there is no general consensus what critical thinking entails. However, at the same time one notices a widespread consensus on the importance of critical thinking, as a competence in which knowledge of our thinking processes and skills to apply certain techniques come together with important attitudes and values. We all have an idea that critical thinking is built upon something we can call ‘virtues of thought’. Open-mindedness, and the ability to change one’s mind when confronted with facts, are two such important virtues. Furthermore, we know what we should not do when attempting to think in a critical manner. The ‘vices’ of thought are incredibly common and affect all of us. These vices can often go unnoticed but become rather obvious when we fail to make judgments and form opinions without looking at the matter in hand from as many angles as possible.

The lack of consensus regarding what critical thinking entails comes quite visible when we try to figure out how to teach it. For example, trying to teach the virtues of thought comes with its own sets of problems

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which mostly relate to the question how do we teach virtues? It is probably easier to teach the rules of critical thinking, or rather, what we should not do (instructions such as *never believe something on insufficient grounds*), but are these rules likely to make students understand and apply such thinking?

In order to answer these questions, we need to figure out what we can agree on regarding critical thinking and find ways to help students to develop the correct competence appropriate for their age and learning. Among the most important attitudes, which are relevant in this context, is to be both willing and able to self-regulate one's thought. In other words, can a student stand back and reflect on his or her own opinions and judgements as there are presented in their stories? To be able to do this is a very admirable competence which is, in turn, what critical thinking is about.

2.2 Stereotypes and Critical Thinking

Stereotyping belongs to a rather large set of prejudices. Prejudices come in various forms and are not all portrayed as stereotypes. Sometimes they seem to be deep rooted in the history of humanity, as if they have evolved with us and are relics from harsher, and perhaps simpler, existence. And sometimes they tell a more recent history of societal changes. One of the most important roles of critical thinking is to combat prejudices, as a prejudice is an opinion or an association which is formed on insufficient grounds. In other words, our thought processes could have been better in terms of reasoning and information. The reason why prejudices have evolved in our thought is that throughout the millennia resorting to a prejudice can have been the safest option. However, to fear what you don't have a direct experience of can easily lead to unfortunate prejudices and sustain them.

The use of stereotypes in our communication comes about when we express a belief about members of a group which is based on an image or a narrative of individuals we assume belong to the group. The problem with what we label as a 'stereotype' is that this belief or assumption is unjustified, most commonly because there is never a homogeneity within the group the stereotype assumes. In fact, a stereotype assumes that all the members of a group have a certain characteristic or a trait. Another problem with stereotypes is that they are often negative, or even vicious, in nature. One can, of course, also see examples of stereotypes with more positive connotations, but they are much rarer. Unfortunately, stereotypes often have their root in conflicts of some sort which may explain why they can be harmful. These conflicts can be between groups of various kinds, e.g., between the sexes and between nationalities.

Despite the potentially harmful impact of the use of stereotypes in communication, we find it very difficult never to use them. Unfortunately, they make communication easier. Language sometimes seems to require the simplicity of using a single term for a group of individuals. But at the same time, we are responsible for how we talk and communicate. We cannot blame it all on traditions and how language has evolved. And it is in this context critical thinking is so important. We need to be able to reflect and identify how we use language and what words we choose. For example, the most obvious example of how the use of language can affect how we perceive the things is the use of euphemisms and dysphemism. Stereotypes can be examples of both, but usually they are examples of dysphemism (see above a table of adjectives with gender connotations to avoid). One simple image with strong emotive connotation ('these emotional girls') allows for a less time-consuming discussion, however unwarranted it is.

2.3 Different Aspects of Critical Thinking

Teaching critical thinking has traditionally been based on three aspects, i.e., to identify rhetorical devices, logical fallacies, and various forms of biases and heuristics. Hardly anyone does believe that simply to address these three aspects is sufficient for fruitful teaching of critical thinking (it is not only a skill after all), but at the same time everyone agrees that it is difficult not to make them central to possible teaching methods on critical thinking. When these identification skills come together with the ability to recognize the importance of truth and facts, and the attitude to question motivated reasoning, self-justification, and overconfidence, we have got the basis of critical thinking.

To be able to successfully navigate all these aspects is particularly important when dealing with stereotypes. In fact, they are – not least gender stereotypes – very prominent in how we try to affect people's opinions on different matters, or our own attitudes. When we are in self-denial about something or have a specific wishful thinking that something is true rather than not, we all become victim of the very human ability to fool each other and ourselves.

The first aspect has to do with how we all use *rhetorical devices* in our communication in order to affect people's attitudes. No one can really say that he or her is free of rhetoric, but surely some sectors in society are more prone to rely on such devices to fight off possible critical questioning. Rhetorical devices and stereotyping are connected in the way we often try to put extra emphasis on prejudicial stereotyping and fend off questioning by using innuendos, downplayers, unwarranted analogies, sarcasm, and hyperboles. Every time someone speaks of the 'so-called' something, or speaks as if 'everyone knows', or even simply sprinkles 'of course' liberally in their statements, that person is actively using rhetorical devices to affect the mind of the person he or she is speaking with. A very common device is simply to refer to a stereotype. A critical person needs to be aware of all these possibilities and make sure it is not affecting how she is reacting to the opinions and stories she is presented with. Also, she needs to reflect critically on her own narrative.

Next we have to move our attention to what has been labelled *logical fallacies* in the literature on critical thinking. A logical fallacy is when our reasoning is flawed because our mind has played a trick on us creating an illusion of a sound reasoning. It can also be used as a sort of rhetorical device when someone wants to fool other people because that person knows the listener will make the intended associations. Many of the logical fallacies are in fact directly connected with stereotyping. To mention one example, we should look at the fallacy *No True Scotsman* (many of the fallacies have strange names in the literature but there is usually a good story behind them). This fallacy is based on the idea that sometimes we try to ignore (and succeed in ignoring) counterexamples of claims we make about groups of people. We try to rationalize that the example does not put a hole in our claim, the example is instead of something which does not belong to the group ("Oh, he did that? Then he is not a true Scotsman."). And there are other examples as well. When falling for the strawman fallacy we do for example try to create a fabricated version of what someone is stating, quite often to reinforce common stereotypes ("she is a girl so this must be what she meant..."). Some forms of stereotyping also have to do with the genetics fallacy, or another one (closely related), which is the appeal to nature. The purpose of such fallacies is to use common stereotypes related to gender and origin to look past counterexamples which do not fit our traditional narrative ("All I said was that considering where they come from you should not be surprised."). These are just few examples of how stereotypes play a role in logical fallacies, in particular when they are consciously used to affect the minds of the listeners or the readers.

Lastly, we must visit the most challenging aspect of what a critical person needs to understand. To be sure, this aspect is not one particular thing, and it goes under many different names as they do not

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always belong to the same set. Sometimes we call it *heuristics*, and sometimes what we refer to should be labelled as *cognitive biases*. The difference between the two is that heuristics are mental ‘shortcuts’ we use in order to make judgements and as such they can be helpful when they turn out to be correct, while cognitive biases are the resulting patterns that take hold in our minds and traditions. Stereotypes are intrinsically interwoven into most such cognitive patterns which aim is to limit the time-consuming process of looking at the issue at hand from as many angles as possible. In such instances we follow what comes most easily to mind, we stick to our first judgement and make it influence all other that come thereafter, we only listen to views and arguments which confirm to or support our previous judgements, we never do not see failures as our own fault but rather a result of external factors (“the others”), and, lastly, we like to make the same judgments as others around us would do. The ways our mind works just to make us use less energy is extraordinary, but unfortunately – especially in the case of harmful use of stereotypes and their prominent role in biases – they often lead us astray.

2.4 The Power of Questioning

Teaching critical thinking in terms of the virtues of thought can be too challenging and teaching only set of rules can be too limiting. Fortunately, there are other ways to teach critical thinking which are better suited to the task of approaching this kind of thinking as a competence, i.e., the combination of knowledge (of stereotypes as they are presented fallacies and biases), skills (being able to identify stereotypes), attitudes (reflection rather than self-justification) and values (valuing truth and facts). The best way to seek such competence is to teach students to do something they already know how to do, although they may have lost their ability to do it consistently. *Questioning* is an extremely powerful tool to enhance one’s critical abilities. We all can ask questions, but regrettably sometimes fail to do it when our biases and fallacies have made us over-confident.

For students in primary or secondary education the questions cannot be too different from everyday questioning. One cannot ask them to come with questions which are far removed from what they produce every day on the classroom. However, in order to make this questioning critical it needs to follow some pattern which ensures that correct critical elements are drawn out with the help of the questions. The following examples show how simple questioning can help the students to approach an issue they want to make a judgement on from as many angles as possible. Such questions do also go extraordinarily well with the task of reflecting on one’s storytelling, for example when the task is to figure out if the story includes (or is perhaps structured around) unwarranted assumptions about the abilities of the members of a group of people.

The first question (what?!) has to do with our reluctance to consider what our narrative is really about. What exactly is the issue about one has decided to form an opinion on? The second question (why?!) helps us to reflect on the influences on our thought. Why is it one has decided to have a strong opinion on something she or he has not given much thought in the past? The third question (really?!) allows us to go through our other beliefs and compare them to what we are now claiming to be true. Is it a coherent picture that emerges, is our new belief something we really belief or is it simply something we decided to pursue due to some other reason?

The next two questions require a bit deeper reflection and understanding. They work as a follow up on the previous three. The fourth question has to do with terminology – does one really understand the notions one is framing an idea around? Stereotypes can seem to be easy words to put into narratives, but does one understand what this terms really means, how it is formed and how it may affect individuals? The fifth question is more aimed at the experience and knowledge (perhaps even data)

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which has shaped our attitude. Is what one's judgement based on real experience or simply something this person heard? Even though this is based on real experience, was the experience sufficiently strong to warrant a generalization of a group of people?

The sixth question is about the aspects of critical thinking we have already discussed: are there fallacies and/or biases present in how one approaches the issue at hand? Even though this question can be the most challenging one for younger students it is possible to train them in these aspects. To be sure, young students perhaps cannot acknowledge all the intricacies of our thought processes, but basic awareness of the most common fallacies and biases is indeed desirable.

Finally, if we really aim at being truly critical in how we frame our beliefs in our storytelling (and, indeed, critical *of* our storytelling) there is one more question we need to ask ourselves. This question is *What if?* Although critical thinking is, to a large extent, based on our willingness to value truth and facts it is not all there is to it. One important ingredient is missing – *the future*, what is still not yet a fact. A critical person knows and understands that by forming our beliefs and making our judgements we are creating the society we live in. Therefore, a person who wants to reflect on what she has said or believes needs to ask herself if her opinion truly reflects how she thinks that society should be. In the end, the most important question a critical person asks herself is what if everyone would in fact agree with me and hold the same position? *Is that a society I would like to live in?*

3. METHODOLOGIES

3.1 Brand Storytelling

Stories are scientifically proven to get a person's attention because they stimulate brain activity. But there's a lot of confusion around the idea of what is brand storytelling and companies don't have a common definition.

Brand Storytelling is using a narrative to connect brand to users, linking what you stand for, to the values you share.

By what you stand for, we mean the essence of your brand. It's not the product you sell. It's why you exist, as Simon Sinek says. What makes you unique.

For example: Nike stands for athletic excellence--not sneakers or sports equipment. Disney stands for family happiness--not theme parks or movies.

Significant Objects was a literary and anthropological experiment that “demonstrated that the effect of narrative on any given object's subjective value can be measured objectively.”

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Walker and Glenn asked 100 creative writers to invent stories about \$129 worth of items and then sold them on eBay to see if the stories enhanced the value of the objects. The net profit was \$3,6 million - a 2,700 percent increase in final markup.

The hypothesis was that stories are a driver of emotional value and can transform insignificant objects into significant ones.

A lot of companies randomly say their values are words like integrity, innovation, etc., but they choose these words because they sound nice, not because they truly reflect who they are.

Adding storytelling to your marketing helps humanize your brand. Having a brand story and what you stand for at the core of your company strategy does more than just help guide marketing activities and create consistent messages that connect with your audience.

It gets your team on the same page, it energizes them so that they know where they're going and why they're going there. It gives a purpose. And that purpose will drive you forward.

The process to define the Brand Storytelling needs combining the following essential aspects:

- Who you are: define your uniqueness
- What you specifically do: describe your activities
- How you solve problems: share specific examples of your brand in action including the product, process and people that make it happen.
- How you add value and care: show and tell what you do daily and tell the stories of others you see going through their experiences
- How you engage and contribute: make it emotional: include characters, personality, humor, pain and joy.

The Brand Storytelling activity and methodology could be applied in the schools. In these organisations it can be used to support teachers and students to re-think gender stereotypes and co-design a new process. This opportunity will involve all them in a very engaging and insightful storymaking time.

3.2 Design Thinking

Design thinking uses extensive user research, feedback loops, and iteration cycles to help understand the user, challenge assumptions, redefine problems, and identify alternative strategies and potential solutions. (Mueller and Thoring 2012) Design thinking provides a solution-

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based approach to solving problems, and it is becoming more and more popular among business schools and other fields (Osterwalder, Pigneur, and Clark 2010).

Brand Storytelling is using a narrative to connect a “brand” to users, linking what it stands for to the values it shares. To define Brand Storytelling we use a specific tool with Brands (companies or managers): it helps us to design all the elements we need for the Brand Story and its digital communication. A Canvas is a template and a structured approach to plan a strategy and process. It provides an overview of the different elements in a design process and is a systemic technique to collect inputs from a project. It was invented by Alex Osterwalder, a Swiss business theorist and entrepreneur as a part of his PhD research. He designed the famous Business Model Canvas, a strategic management template that helps businesses to describe, design and analyse their business models. Here we modified that one in order to have a customized canvas to carry on the Laboratories in the schools. This tool is made to support teacher in designing the activity and it is not directly used with the students.

From this general overview we will go box by box to see how to fulfil it.

4. DIGITAL LABORATORY “hands on”

4.1 How they work

The best way to have a short overview related to the scheme of the Digital Laboratories.

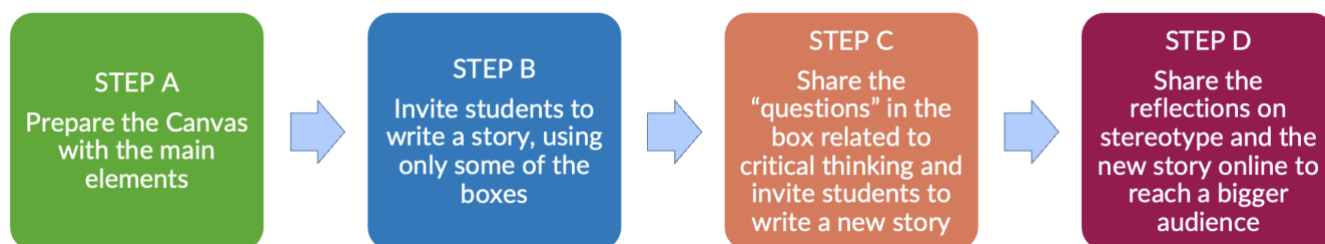
- Goal: Teacher aims to support class to overcome or prevent stereotypes
- How They Work: Teacher involves the class in a lab for a fixed time
- Output: The class enriches the skills related to the Critical Thinking and publishes stories online, in the chosen channels

The tool is the Diogenes Canvas.

Diogenes Storytelling Canvas			Date:	Designed by:
1.General Goal What do you want to achieve with this activity in your context (school/class/or...)?				
4.Scenario What's the situation	2.Key message related to a stereotype/behaviour What's the most important element related to a stereotype/behaviour you want to underline with the story	5.Main Characters Describe the main characters and their way of thinking/act		
6.Challenges What about the adventures of the characters	3.Image (or images) Think about one (or more) symbol/metaphor/image for the Key Message, to help you to describe/share your story with others online	7.Reward What are the most relevant achievements/changes characters could reach		
8.Reflections/Critical thinking What are the most relevant points of attention to boost a critical thinking		9.Digital Sharing How the story will be presented (writings/video/drawings/comics...) and digital channels to share it		
Designed by: Antonia Colasante - Agenfap				

The **sessions durations** are related to the students involved in terms of: numerosity, typology, age, sensitiveness to the topics and so on.

The flow of the whole activity is as follows:



4.1.1 Session 1 - STEP A

There's a preliminary work for the teacher, which is focused on the fulfilling of the Canvas. This activity is important for the teacher to:

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- Focus the goal to achieve and the kind of stereotype: are there any situation/relationships/discussions in which gender stereotypes are already seen?
- Design the process of the activity: duration (how many hours can be used, in class or as a homework). Teacher could also decide what kind of story will be written (comedy, drama or let the students free of choice)
- Collect all the information to give to the class to let them start with the writing lab. How many details the teacher wants to give to the students is related to her/his own evaluation
- List the potential critical thinking questions to support the class to overcome the gender stereotypes

In this step the teacher fulfills the following 9 BOXES to design the whole activity.

- 1) **GENERAL GOAL:** The teacher defines the main goal wants to achieve with the laboratory. Here the focus is on the stereotype: what kind of stereotype, in which kind of situation it happens. So this is the reason why we want to use this kind of laboratory.
- 2) **KEY MESSAGE** this box underlines the most relevant elements the teacher expects students will learn from the activity
- 3) **IMAGE** here is a symbolic representation of the Key Message

The elements from box 4 to 7 are those given to the students as elements to prepare their stories

- 4) **SCENARIO**
- 5) **MAIN CHARACTERS**
- 6) **CHALLENGES**
- 7) **REWARD**
- 8) **CRITICAL THINKING:** This box is shared with the guys during the **STEP C**, this box gives the possibility to help guys with some “critical thinking questions” to reflect and rethink about what they have already done. The aim is to overwrite the first version of the story.
- 9) **DIGITAL SHARING** This box is focused on the process to share the story created in a digital way: blog, social network, newsletter

4.1.2 Session 2- STEP B

During a class time the teacher asks students to individually prepare a story within a defined time. The students must write/draw/design one story with the elements taken from the Canvas (boxes from 4 to 7: scenario, characters, challenges, reward).

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At the end of the given time, some of the students will share their story.

There will be also the opportunity to share some reflections about the activity done and the teacher could see how many stereotypes are used.

4.1.3 Session 3 – STEP C

In this session the teacher asks to the students to think about the stereotypes they used into their stories and uses the box 8 in the Canvas (What are the most relevant points of attention to boost a critical thinking) with the list of critical thinking questions she/he has already prepared. This is a moment to support students to think again to their stories in order to design how they could change them.

Now the students are invited to prepare, in small groups in order to boost a sharing time among the students, another story. The students will enhance opinions and ideas and try to merge their stories into one with the attention to avoid stereotypes.

4.1.4. Session 4 – STEP D

There will be **Debrief Time**: the teacher will invite one student per group to present the new story designed and invite the class to reflect about the differences among the first release and the second ones. The debrief will support the class to identify the stereotypes and the solutions students designed to overcome them.

In this session there will be also a **Digital Sharing time**: each group is invited to design how they would like to share their stories to an external audience. They are invited to choose an image to enhance the power of the story and students will be invited to think about the impact/reactions to the audience.

The teacher could suggest what she/he has prepared into the box 3.

Then there will be the articles for the school blogsite or the facebook posts on the school official account or any other solution came into their mind.