Guest Editorial Preface

Second Life

Leslie Jarmon, University of Texas at Austin, USA
Michael Thomas, University of Central Lancashire, UK

The third edition of the International Journal of Virtual and Personal Learning Environments includes four articles originally planned for the second part of Dr Leslie Jarmon’s special edition on the virtual world of Second Life. Sadly Leslie passed away just days before the edition was due to be completed in November 2009. Though I like many others had never met Leslie face-to-face, her online identity never failed to communicate her dedication, enthusiasm and commitment as an educator. She was and will remain an inspiration to many of us who continue to work in online learning in the hope it will improve access to educational opportunities and foster enhanced teaching and learning environments for our students. I am very grateful to the authors of the first four papers in this edition for completing their papers on time; like me I know they felt strongly that the work Leslie had started should reach completion.

In sporting events these days a minute of warm applause is sometimes preferred to a respectful minute of silence when commemorating someone’s life. We hope you can hear a similar affirmation and celebration of Leslie’s passion for education in these pages. Leslie was one of the first Associate Editors of IJVPLE and we will long cherish her contribution to getting the journal up and running. We dedicate this edition of IJVPLE to her memory.

This edition consists of five research papers and two book reviews. In the first contribution, ‘Affective Load and Engagement in Second Life: Experiencing Urgent, Persistent, and Long Term Information Needs’, Diane Nahl considers the use of learners’ self-reports as a strategy for dealing with the pedagogical and technological challenges presented by virtual worlds. Nahl explores how self-reports can develop discourses of self-reflection thus enabling learners to raise their meta-cognitive and meta-affective awareness of learning in these new environments.

In ‘An Interdisciplinary Design Project in Second Life: Creating a Virtual Marine Science Learning Environment’, Triggs, Jarmon, and Villareal examine how virtual environments can be used to address pedagogical challenges in real life. VWs provide rich environments for learner experimentation where economic considerations may be inhibitive such as in Marine Science. The paper presents findings from a study using Second Life to engage learners in an interdisciplinary approach to Design education.

In the third paper, ‘The Development of a Personal Learning Environment in Second Life’, the authors report on a qualitative research study focusing on improving learner collaboration. Working with a number of nonprofit organizations, the research examines the use of virtual worlds with disadvantaged learners who would typically not have access to ICTs. Utilising a participatory action research methodology, the case study explored ways of motivating and engaging marginalised groups such as the...
homeless to construct shared and meaningful educational experiences.

Sheila Webber’s paper, ‘Investigating Modes of Student Inquiry in Second Life as Part of a Blended Approach’, discusses a study of inquiry based learning with first year undergraduate students at the University of Sheffield in the UK. Using a blended approach utilizing the classroom, WebCT and Second Life, Webber explores how online learning environments can be used to facilitate students’ inquiry and literacy skills.

In the final research paper, ‘A Framework for the Assessment of Wiki-based Collaborative Learning Activities’, Meishar-Tal and Schencks focus on the challenges associated with assessing wiki-based collaborative learning activities. Assessing Web 2.0 applications in pedagogical contexts is an important and often overlooked area of emerging technologies, and the paper outlines a general framework for assessing collaborative learning in a wiki environment that should be of wider significance.


We hope that you will enjoy reading this special edition of IJVPLE and consider contributing to the journal in the future, whether as an author, reviewer or special edition editor.

Leslie Jarmon
Guest Editor
Michael Thomas
Editor-in-Chief
IJVPLE