Chapter 9

An Informal Methodology for Teaching Through Virtual Worlds: Using Internet Tools and Virtual Worlds in a Coordinated Pattern to Teach Various Subjects

Claudio Pacchiega
Indire, Italy

ABSTRACT

The target of this chapter is to provide an insight on an informal methodology exploiting the strongest possibilities of Virtual Reality worlds (supported by a full usage of other web-based and social media tools), as a viable effective and rewarding tool both for teachers and students to assist in Educational classes on many teaching subjects. This is shown using a practical example effectively performed in Summer 2016. The goal is obtained using already established methodologies like Flipped Classroom, Educational Marketing, Gamification, Cooperative Learning. The result is quite attractive and immersive and easy to organize and use even by teachers not too technically experts.

INTRODUCTION

When talking about long distance learning and co-learning, current e-technology is not much help: the simple and exclusive usage of tools like Moodle, Skype, email or chat systems often produce too complex an environment to set up (and sometimes needing much money and investment), and the process and outcome is difficult to monitor and to engage participants properly unless organizers possess a lot of professional/technical skills. The difficulties involved can discourage educators to use these tools since technical difficulties are felt to be overwhelming and not worth the time.

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On the other hand, experiences rich with enthusiasm, fully immersive, and lived as a “game” are often a good way to produce gratification and improve self-esteem both for the teachers and the participants. What the author experienced during the last 8 years is that a mixed usage of various tools, with an emphasis on the 3D experience and the quick and real interaction that it is possible to produce when people are effectively living experiences in a well-defined space and the identification with a “real” and independent self-projection, is a prerequisite to create a persistent imprinting for the learning experience which then becomes a substantial part of the participant background. Organizing classes in 3D virtual spaces can also be easy, fun and convenient.

There are various opinions, on the utility of Virtual Worlds and Gamification as an effective tool usable in Education, as stated for example by (Gregory, 2014):

> There is little doubt that the technological advances in recent years combined with the blending of virtual worlds with the ‘real’ afford enormous possibilities for education in the future. However, as is the case with many technological innovations, in the early days of virtual worlds there was more rhetoric than research on virtual world education. Virtual worlds were seen by some as the golden grail of education. They were to be ‘magic places’ where the best of all educational practices could be utilised and many educators viewed them as the panacea for the challenges of distance and online learning (…)

The intention of this chapter is to provide a real methodology that can be used effectively to help teachers and trainers willing to use virtual worlds to design and organize virtual and distant teaching classes using a mixture of tools freely available on the internet.

Most of the suggestions and practical hints you can find here have been tested during many years of teaching performed in Second Life, OpenSimulator and other virtual worlds (including Minecraft or Cloud Party) during the period from 2008 until 2017 with encouraging outcome: many people have exploited the concepts to further develop their projects and conduct complex educational sessions with their students.

This chapter describes:

1. **Ingredients**: General Tools and concepts we can use
2. **Orchestration**: Organizational tools for helping in organizing the class
3. **Cooking a Class**: Example of a real class organized with this methodology
4. **An Example History Class**: Practical suggestions
5. **Results and Feedbacks**: Live experiences outcomes

**INGREDIENTS**

**OpenSimulator**

Most of the author’s classes use OpenSimulator (an open source version of Second Life), which is equivalent to the commercial version and very easy to set up without spending money (Jacka Booth, 2014). See (Sullivan, 2016) on how, being open source, it can be easily extended and redeployed to provide a fully, already set up and working environment for learning experiences.