Constructivist and Constructionist Approaches to Graduate Teaching in Second Life: Ethical Considerations and Legal Implications

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ABSTRACT

As a growing number of faculty use constructivist and constructionist approaches to teaching in SL, little research exists on the many ethical considerations and legal implications that affect course development. Following the experiences of the instructor and five students, their 12-week journey is documented through interviews, journals, blogs, weekly course activities, SL class dialogs, and in-world assignments. Additionally, five faculty and staff experts who taught or trained in SL at this university were also interviewed and consulted. Ethical considerations in constructivist and constructionist teaching were time, appearance, skills, scaffolded instruction, playful exploration, vicarious experience, self-directed project development, construction of objects, constructivism and constructionism balance, social networking and collaboration, harassment and grieving, false identities and alternate avatars, chat log sharing, and copyright and trademark violations. Lessons learned included developing scaffolded pedagogical approaches that moved from direct teaching to constructivism and constructionism, and required faculty and student adherence to the SL TOS, Community Standards, and Intellectual Property policy.

Keywords: Constructionism, Constructivism, Pedagogy, Second Life, Virtual Reality

SECOND LIFE USES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Second Life is a virtual world in which inhabitants engage in a variety of rich sensory experiences that allow them to express themselves and co-construct their learning experiences through active engagement in simulations (Antonacci & Modress, 2008), role-plays (Gao, Jeongmin, & Koehler, 2009; Mayrath, Scanchez, Traphagan, Heikes, & Trivedi, 2007), modeling complex scenarios (Gourlay & Tombs, 2009), explorations that...
tion (Boudreau, Headley, & Ashford, 2009),
and solving authentic problems (Muldoon &
Kofoed, 2009) (Figure 1).

Linden Labs’ Second Life Multiple User
Virtual Environment (MUVE), launched in
2003, is the preeminent “in-world” environment
for those 18 and over, with over 31,000 regions
(Second Life Wiki, 2010), an average of 589,000
unique users a month, and $133,000 U.S. dol-
sars in transactions a day (Shepard, 2010;
Second Life Economic Statistics, 2010). Mem-
bership is free, though one must agree to the
Terms of Service when downloading the pro-
gram. Avatars are life-like, photo-realistic, and
customizable. Genitalia are usually purchased
for an additional cost, but are also found at free
marketplaces within Second Life. Second Life
(SL) has an income that rivals small countries.
With hundreds of universities worldwide in SL,
(Second Life Blogs, 2009) and total member-
ship at roughly 1 million, SL is a powerful
platform for teaching and learning (Dede, 1997;
Tennesen, 2009).

University faculty are using SL for teach-
ing, recruitment, and professional development
in greater numbers, worldwide, as they wrestle
with what constitutes proper pedagogy (Appel,
2006; Boudreau, Headley, & Ashford, 2009;
DiRamio, 2005; Felix, 2005). Some faculty
continue to prefer to contain students in an SL
classroom that imitates brick-and-mortar build-
ings and teach traditionally with PowerPoint,
fearing potential ethical issues and resulting
legal problems that could result from students
exploring and building freely. However, a
growing number of faculty favor a more ac-
tive, student-centered and engaged approach to
teaching (Hung; Tan & Koh, 2006; Jonassen,
2000; Neely, Bowers, & Ragas, 2010) that in-
volves exploration, student-centered learning,
and construction.

In SL one is only limited by ones’ imagi-
nation. Students can create buildings, jewelry,
vehicles, clothing, three-dimensional repre-
sentations of ideas, historical recreations, new
worlds, artistic creations, operating room labs,
and flights of fancy that would be too expensive
or impossible in the real world, (Antonacci &
Modress, 2008; Wang & Hsu, 2008; Wongtang-
swad, 2010). However, the more interesting and
useful a virtual world becomes then the more
challenges that arise with it (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Chichen Itza at sunrise
Children’s Internet Safety Websites
Ryan Alan Moreau and Howard Richard Hershorn (2012). Encyclopedia of Cyber Behavior (pp. 96-104).
www.igi-global.com/chapter/children-internet-safety-websites/64745?camid=4v1a

An Examination of the Factors Influencing Consumers' Visit of C2C Websites
www.igi-global.com/chapter/an-examination-of-the-factors-influencing-consumers-visit-of-c2c-websites/107816?camid=4v1a