Chapter 7
Design of a Learning Activity in Second Life: Active Teaching of Social Educators

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ABSTRACT
Second Life™ (SL) is now an accepted platform for educational activities. SL supports a range of activities from informal meetings to complete courses offered in the 3D world as part of a university’s curriculum. Learning activities within SL can be identified as a form of e-learning that facilitates learning through the mediating artifacts of the technology. This chapter explores the use of SL using learning activities that are designed to activate students and to facilitate the creation of social activities within groups. The chapter uses the theoretical lens of Activity Theory to examine the operational mechanisms behind designing a course activity that engages people with lifelong disability in the active teaching of health professionals about disability.

INTRODUCTION
People with disabilities have criticized health professionals for having limited knowledge of the issues they face and for having patronizing attitudes (Balandin & Armstrong, 2001). If student health workers and practicing health professionals are not given opportunities to interact with people with disabilities and learn from them, they are unlikely to be comfortable interacting with this group of people. There is an identified need to involve people with disability actively in teaching and health service curriculum planning (Estrella, 2000; Knox, Mok & Parmenter, 2000). Lectures by people with disability help meet the educational needs of the students and workers...
within the helping professions and can be used to promote lifelong learning among disability workers in both primary- and specialized care (Lennox & Diggens, 1999). Yet little is known about the potential of different teaching mediums such as virtual worlds to promote interactions between people with disability and students who are training to provide a range services to this group of people.

Research into the efficacy of providing students with access to virtual guest lecturers has demonstrated that connecting students with virtual guest experts results in a number of positive outcomes for students, including increased levels of motivation and interaction (Kumari, 2001). This chapter presents an innovative design for a teaching activity for student health professionals. People with lifelong disability (e.g., cerebral palsy, autism spectrum disorder, intellectual disability) will record a series of lectures. Students will choose whether to view the lectures live during the recording process, on the web, or on a DVD. Students and lecturers will then be involved in a follow up reflection activity in the virtual world of SL. In this activity students will have the opportunity to discuss the lecture with the lecturers with disability and also to be involved in some social activities. These will be designed to provide students with an opportunity to interact with the person with disability while undertaking a new task jointly. In preparation for the reflection and activity sessions, the students and their supervisors who will participate also, require sufficient background information and practice to be able to interact competently with the technology that they will use. In this chapter we provide some background on the training of the participants in the use of Second Life as part of the learning activity. The case described in this chapter demonstrates one method of ensuring good practice for the support of lifelong learning and at the same time allows for learners to come into contact with individuals and groups who can contribute to the learning process outside the traditional “classroom” learning activity.

**BACKGROUND**

**On the Use of Virtual Worlds for Learning**

Virtual worlds (VW) have been in existence for longer than most people think, as pointed out by Graham Davies (2009, pp. 3-6). One example of an early game was Colossal Cave Adventure designed by Will Crowther in 1975 based on a cave network in Kentucky. The simulation ran on Prime mini-computers available in some colleges at the time. The user interface was text-only and for single users. In the 1990s Multi-User Domain Object Oriented worlds (MOOs) were developed allowing participants to share text-based chat and to share text-based descriptions of objects. Many MOOs were designed for learning foreign languages, one example being schMooZe University. Graphical interfaces were introduced to VW around 1986, with Quantum Link an online service that was developed for role play. Traveler, available since 1994, was a virtual world that was also used for teaching foreign languages. It allowed for audio communication between avatars represented as heads in a landscape. Active Worlds, available since 1997, offers at present a 3D chat and VW building platform and has support for educational institutions with over 80 participating members.

Today three dimensional (3D) virtual worlds are being applied to traditional learning environments, and make use of a wide range of learning and teaching activities. Compared to two dimensional (2D) web learning environments, the 3D environments or worlds allow participants, represented through avatars, to move around and interact with 3D virtual objects in a shared multi-user 3D context. Further, while on many 2D forums the discussion is delayed response to earlier posts, the discussion in a 3D virtual world is real-time and simulates a meeting in the real world. As such, interaction in a virtual world creates a sense of community and offers advantages over other types of distance-learning courses that do not offer face
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