Chapter 9
Learning Problem-Solving Strategies in Virtual Worlds that Encourage People to Respect Human Rights

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ABSTRACT

This chapter will discuss educational projects for learning problem-solving strategies in virtual worlds that encourage people to respect human rights. The discussion includes philosophical issues that concern the need to design new models for virtual learning that engage a person's own ways of thinking and interacting with the educational content. For example, the instructional design for these projects is based on adapting the Think Aloud and Means-End analysis research methods for the evaluation of how learning about human rights in virtual environs might transfer to the real life community. The projects have been presented over the past eight years in the virtual worlds of Second Life and the Open Sims.

INTRODUCTION

How can people choose to act in ways that respect human rights in a 21st century global society?

Whether our information is represented as images on cave walls thousands of years ago, or in contemporary 3D virtual worlds, the kind of knowledge that helps a person care about individual diversity and common humanitarian values is not well understood. For example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations in 1948 with the hope of preventing crimes against humanity that occurred during World War II.

However, almost seventy years later dictators and terrorists continue to threaten our lives and now they can more easily communicate their plans through the internet and social media.

At the same time, information technology can help create new possibilities for people to learn problem-solving strategies that encourage respect for human rights.

This chapter will discuss the projects designed by the author and her colleagues in the virtual worlds of Second Life and the Open Sims that offer this kind of education (Bennett & Patrice, 2013). The discussion will include;

1. The philosophy and rationale for the educational content, instructional design
2. Research methods for evaluating the virtual learning experience.
3. Descriptions of example projects.
4. Summary and suggestions for future virtual education about human rights.

BACKGROUND EDUCATIONAL CONTENT AND INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

The Educational Content

The projects involve learning about the thirty universal human rights listed by the United Nations by exploring problem-solving strategies that assist in translating these ideals into action (see Appendix 1 for a description of these rights).

For example, Eleanor Roosevelt asks people to think about how to bring humanitarian values into their daily life in her community guide entitled, *In Your Hands.*

Where after all do human rights begin? In small places, close to home -- so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any map of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person, the neighborhood he lives in, the school or college he attends, the factory, farm or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world. (Roosevelt, 1958).

To better understand how people can learn to express human rights as individuals in a global society, the educational projects are designed to engage people in exploring their ideas in the virtual world and how they might transfer to their real-life environment.

The Instructional Design

A virtual world offers the chance to learn about a subject at both a conceptual level of knowledge and as an immediate sensory experience which is essential for learning about the meaning of human rights. This kind of knowledge requires a person to be aware of their values, what they believe is right and wrong for people to care about, and how they decide to express their choices.

When a person uses an Avatar designed to represent them in the virtual world, there is the opportunity to learn and share information as a real time interactive experience. An experience that includes the possibility of expressing oneself through voice, text, images, and the animated movements of an Avatar in environments that represent a wide spectrum of human imagination. The person can also connect to other information from the virtual world, such as video, web sites, and social media.

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