Chapter 10
Exploring Ideas and Possibilities of Second Life as an Advanced E-Learning Environment

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ABSTRACT

Web 2.0 is changing the paradigm of using the Internet which is affecting the e-learning paradigm. In this chapter, e-learning 2.0 and its strategies will be described for net generation. E-learning 2.0 was followed by introduction of Second Life as an advanced e-learning environment. Flexibility, strong social networking, and residents' creative activities of Second Life allow unlimited potential to educators when they apply various educational principles to designing a learning environment. The authors assert that Second Life is a classroom built in 3D cyber space. Some cases that Second Life was used for a new e-learning environment are also presented. The 3D virtual classroom context is attractive to the educators with the same appearance as real life as well as prepared educational elements which can be built into Second Life. Exploring ideas and possibilities of Second Life provides alternatives to make up for the limits in the current e-learning environment.

INTRODUCTION

Kwanwoo, who is in 2nd grade at an elementary school, has no desk at home. However, he enjoys reading books and working with his laptop on a bed instead of a firm desk. As in this example, for the digital generation, classrooms and libraries are not necessary learning places. Laptops with the wireless Internet have made people learn well on their beds, couches, or a street café. We would not have expected to see this a decade ago. Until now, classrooms have been the primary place in teaching and learning. However, the World Wide Web has emerged as the primary way most people use the Internet and has occupied the digital generation's daily lives. "The Web has spawned a wealth of new, network-based applications, from digital music stores to new venues for scholarly publishing (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005)". Indeed, the availability of network access, in wired or a wireless connection, is ubiquitous and taken for granted.

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The Web has evolved to expand its service to hold blogs, user-created content, and collective intelligence for a problem. According to this expansion, people using the Web have begun to change - they want to be more open to the public, participate more actively in their interests, and try to share their knowledge with others. Changes on the Web and its users "are sweeping across entire industries as a whole and are not unique to education; indeed, in many ways education has lagged behind some of these trends and is just beginning to feel their wake (Downes, 2005)". The new Web is called Web 2.0 and people using it are called "digital natives". These new users approach work, learning, and play in different ways - they absorb information quickly, in images and video as well as text, from multiple sources simultaneously. They operate at "twitch speed," expecting instant responses and feedback (Prensky, 2001). They prefer random access to media, avoiding sequential processing information. They want to be online, expecting to be in constant communication with their friends. They are as likely to create their own content and want it to be delivered free to others. New learners with new traits expect new e-learning strategies. Traditional e-learning with digitized material content in the classroom cannot guarantee active participation in learning and vivid representation for their real lives.

The new Web does not refer to an update to any technical specifications but to changes in the way software developers and end-users use the Web. These trends manifest themselves under a variety of guises, names, and technologies: social computing, user generated content, software as a service, podcasting, blogs, and the read–write web. Taken together, they are Web 2.0, the next generation, user-driven, and intelligent web (O'Reilly & Musser, 2006). It is a set of economic, social, and technology trends that collectively form the basis for the next generation of the Internet characterized by user participation, openness, and sharing.

There are a number of Web-based services and applications that demonstrate the foundations of the Web 2.0 concept and they are already being used to a certain extent in education. "These are not really technologies as such, but services built using the building blocks of the technologies and open standards that underpin the Internet and the Web (Anderson, 2007)". These include blogs, wikis, multi-media sharing services, content syndication, podcasting, and content tagging services. Many of these Web technology applications are relatively mature, having been in use for a number of years, although new features and capabilities are being added on a regular basis. It is worth noting that many of these newer technologies are concatenations, i.e. they make use of existing services. Second Life is one of them. It has built-in Web 2.0 concepts: social networking, wikis, communication tools, collaborating and sharing information. More importantly, it is being used for educational purposes.

Second Life is a virtual world. It is a 3D online space, totally created by its users. Within Second Life, anything imagined can be done, created, and realized. Adopting Second Life as an educational environment enables educators and learners to be more creative and adaptive in how they use the environment and in developing new ways of learning, rather than purely replicating real-life into second life. Learners and educators can work together anywhere using the Second Life environment. Using Second Life as a supplement to traditional classroom environments provides new opportunities for enriching an existing curriculum. Educational organizations using Second Life include universities, libraries, and museums, national and local organizations. For example, there are some campuses, help islands, and schools such as science.

E-learning 2.0 is currently finding most interest from both academic and industrial communities. It is based on the Web 2.0 vision that refers to a second generation of Internet services that let people collaborate and share information online in previously unavailable ways. Thus, this chapter aims to explore Second Life in its possibilities,