Chapter 4.3
Exploring Interprofessional Educational Possibilities:
A Case Study from a Virtual World

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reports a pilot research study investigating the possibility for Interprofessional education in a 3D multi user 'virtual world' known as Second life® (SL) (Linden Corporation). Following a brief introduction and context of interprofessional education (IPE) in health and social care, the pilot research project is reported. The goal was to gather insights into IPE and teaching and learning in virtual worlds. An action research approach enabled the author to collaborate with students and other experienced users of SL. Drawing on emerging interprofessional, constructivist and activity theories and insights from the research project, this chapter makes suggestions for utilising immersive worlds for interprofessional teaching and learning. It identi-
fies the need for further research focusing on the vital ingredients necessary for interprofessional learning in virtual worlds, and a requirement to ensure that patient/client/service users remains the focus of the students' learning, which is the essence of successful interprofessional working.

INTRODUCTION

Headrick and Khaleel (2006) identify three key strategies for educating future health professionals to improve care. First, the integration or theory and practice, especially in the service of patients/clients, secondly, the assessment of learning, and finally, the creation of interprofessional experiences. It is the third of Headrick and Khaleel's strategies, creation of interprofessional e-learning experiences, that this chapter addresses. Multi user virtual environments (MUVE) and Multi user

Dungeons (MUDS) have been used to facilitate multi-player games run over computer networks since the late 1970's (Dieterle & Clarke, 2009) The affordances of MUVE are well known amongst gamers but less familiar to educationalists.

Teaching and learning in immersive worlds has interested many Higher Education (HE) establishments throughout the world and specifically the United Kingdom. Chandler et al. (2007) identified that "once in a virtual world such as Second Life academics are faced by a new environment with novel ways of teaching and a wealth of potential resources to facilitate their teaching". Conklin, (2007) suggested 101 uses for second Life in the college classroom. The evidence is that many Higher Education Institutions are using Immersive worlds for a variety of teaching and learning activities.

During 2008, teaching and learning in SL increased so rapidly that it is difficult to quantify the nature extent and variety of these activities. John Kirriemuir, (Eduserv 2007-2009) provides snapshots illustrating how higher education institutions in the United Kingdom (UK) are using SL. The January (2009) snapshot identified a record number of responses and the virtual world watch (VWW) has identified actual and potential needs of UK academic virtual world developers require. Examples of teaching and learning in SL range from research and composition skills (Robbins 2007/8), computer science (Hobbs et al., 2006) to archaeology (Wheeler et al., 2008). In depth peer reviewed studies of learning and virtual worlds are still rare (Carr, 2008). Small research projects (Carr, Oliver & Burn, 2008) have focused on the teaching and learning in immersive virtual worlds.

Larger studies (Preview JISC 2008) have focused specifically on problem based learning for specific health care professionals (paramedics and clinical managers). Savin-Badin (2008) explores the socio political impact of virtual world learning on higher education, a major research project funded by the Leverhulme Trust. Pedagogical issues and possibilities of second life are important

not only because they might be different from other environments but because there are issues about power and control in games where avatars may be representative oneself or someone else (Savin-Badin, 2007): see http://cuba.coventry.ac.uk/leverhulme/category/research-themes/theme-3/. Some studies remain 'work in progress' (Hetherington, 2008; Chandler et al., 2008; (Savin-Badin, 2008), but for others findings are emerging (Toro-Troconis et al., 2008), (Carr et al., 2008).

Interprofessional Education

The creation of IP learning experiences, has challenged educators to provide authentic, realistic and appropriate learning experiences (Wright 2009). There are many reports of IPE provision (Goosey and Barr, 1998; Scammell et al., 2008) and interprofessional (IP) experiences (Craddock et al, 2006). Clinical or service based interprofessional learning (IPL) experiences are common and a number of IPE initiatives such as ward based (Bray and Howkins, 2006) or placement learning (Armitage et al., 2009) based on short face to face interactive learning between the professions have been reported.

Emerging evidence of successful IPE experiences been demonstrated (Freeth et al., 2002), most evaluations focus on student satisfaction and successful module delivery and most evaluations of IPE programmes are often positive (Ireland et al., 2008). These evaluations, whilst important and informative do little to demonstrate that learners have changed their behaviour, acquired communication skills and all necessary attributes and competencies of interprofessional working (CUILU, 2006). An alternative measure of the success or otherwise of IPE could focus on evidence of collaboration, understanding of roles and acquisition and demonstration of team working skills.

Emerging theory suggests that IPE takes place when practitioners work together, learn together and learn about each other (Barr, 2000) and that

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