

Chapter 8

Instructional Design Meets Politeness Issues in Virtual Worlds

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ABSTRACT

Attempts at incorporating emerging and innovative instructional technology, like virtual worlds, into educational settings requires efforts to understand new discourse patterns that may develop and bring in a learner-centered instructional design that takes the affordances and constraints of the new technology into consideration. These efforts can contribute to an effective and positive learning experience for learners. Drawing upon observations of different types of learning activities held in Second Life, an increasingly popular virtual world, this chapter aims at initiating a discussion interweaving the concerns for politeness, reflecting learners' psychological needs during their interactions with fellow learners and technology, with considerations of instructional design in a virtual world as a new learning context. Such a discussion has the potential of more effectively exploiting what new immersive environments can offer for learning.

INTRODUCTION

The emergence and development of virtual world technology has led to an increasing interest in integrating virtual worlds into learning and teaching. Such integration creates a new learning culture, bringing with it a need for careful

documentation of the learning taking place in such environments as well as attention to careful design of educationally relevant and effective activities. Simply because the technology seems particularly dazzling is no reason to reduce the importance that educational technologists have traditionally given to good instructional design

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of learning activities. In this chapter, we want to offer insights and suggestions about the use of virtual worlds in learning based on two projects that involved researching (1) graduate students' use of discourse and face-saving strategies when they gathered with team members in Second Life to complete several computer-supported collaborative learning projects, the CSCL project (see Figure 1), and (2) how professional journalists from various countries in Latin America improved their strategies and decision-making skills in the event of a crisis by participating in simulation and role-taking activities in Second Life, the journalism project (see Figure 2). Drawing from a series of in-world observations of different types of learning activities held in Second Life for these two projects, we want to offer insights about important instructional design considerations, about issues of discourse strategies particularly relevant to the affordances and constraints provided by Second Life, and about areas that we believe need further exploration.

This chapter is organized in five parts. We will provide (1) background information about relevant constructs and ideas that impinge on our work, (2) a brief description of the two projects, the CSCL and the journalism projects, informing this chapter, (3) some instructional implications for designing and holding learning activities in virtual worlds, (4) a description of the discourse

issues associated with politeness and face work in learning activities held in virtual worlds, and (5) a discussion of what needs further investigation and development in educational uses of virtual worlds and in research on such worlds.

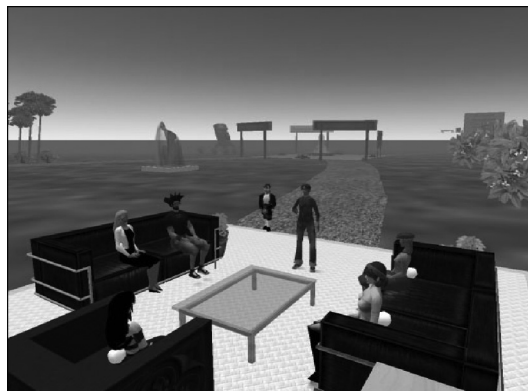
BACKGROUND

In this section, we provide an overview and definition of three main topics relevant to this chapter: virtual worlds, instructional design, and discourse strategies.

Virtual Worlds

Immersive Three-Dimensional (3D) virtual environments, called *virtual worlds* or *MUVEs* (Multi-User Virtual Environments), are of increasing interest to education for their potential to broaden instructional possibilities. As of 2009, over 300 educational institutions had a presence in Second Life (Jarmon, Traphagan, Mayrath, & Trivedi, 2009). Many universities and institutions worldwide have conducted classes and had field trips with their students in virtual worlds (Lamb, 2006; Graves, 2008). The idea of using virtual worlds for education is growing, perhaps simply because the virtual world environment is itself growing (FitzGerald, 2007; Keegan, 2008)

Figure 1. Team conference area in the CSCL project



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