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Wiki Assignment
Media 710

Online version available here: <http://tharpk.pbworks.com/Virtual-Worlds-in-Education>

Twining, P. (2009). Exploring the education potential of virtual worlds- Some reflections from the SPP. *British Journal of Educational Technology* , 496-514.

This article did an entire case-study of the use of Second Life in education. They argue that there is rapid change happening in the 21st century and there is a “skill gap” for newer generations. They show this by pointing out the growing rates of disaffection in schools, growing teenage truancy, and more parents pulling their children out of the education system in favor of homeschooling them instead. They propose the “Schome Initiative” to break the mold and create a radically different “lived experience.” In the study they found that there are four dimensions of learning; learning about, learning by doing, learning by playing a role and learning by becoming. The use of Avatars was discussed as a way to learn about identity and invoke self-reflection. They stated that virtual worlds allow people to “play out their personal preferences without being constrained by established roles and behavioral expectations.” They conclude that in Second Life, “new goals, structures and roles that transform familiar ways of doing things into new ways to solve problems,” will be the driving force in this new-age world of education.

After reading this article, I became even more intrigued by the many different uses in Second Life. The article discussed ideas and issues that I hadn’t thought of before and opened my eyes to the psychology behind a virtual world. I enjoyed reading comments and excerpts from chats and discussions that were posted by students they were studying in Second Life. It was interesting to read the comments, being a Second Life user myself, and I agreed with the students on many points. The end of the article left me with an interesting question; will Second Life have an impact on teaching in real life? Only time will tell, but I would like to explore this issues more in-depth in my research paper.

Bailey, F., & Moar, M. (2001). The Vertex Project: Children creating and populating 3D virtual worlds. *NSEAD* , 19-30.

In this article, the authors described their pilot study in what they called “The Vertex Project.” The researchers set out to study elementary school children with their use of ActiveWorlds, an online virtual world. They chose that particular software because of its ease of use and the ability to edit and construct easily within the environment. In addition, school were able to work in a secure environment not accessible to the general public; a benefit when teaching 7 to 11 year-olds. Another benefit of the

program was the ability for students to use the in program web browser that allowed them to access web sites containing supportive information. The researchers learned a many things from studying the students. They noticed that the students were drawn to the technology immediately. There were excited and highly motivated and remained engaged throughout the whole process. At first, the children thought of the virtual world as a “game” and referred to it as “playing.” They enjoyed talking to other children via text chat but liked the voice chat even more. Some saw their own avatar as a character while others thought of it as an extension of themselves. The researchers had the children work on building their own world in the online environment and were pleased to see that the children excelled at this despite the complex building process. They noted that the children worked well together to collaborate, discuss, plan and negotiate building projects. The researchers concluded that” further study is needed in the communicative, collaborative and creative possibilities embodied in the technology.”

This article was really interested to read and provided me with more information about the other types of virtual worlds that are out there. Although the article is quite dated, I still believe the material is relevant. I enjoyed learning about the study of younger children and I was pleased to learn about the success they had with implementing the technology. Although I need to do further research in this area, I think virtual worlds like ActiveWorlds can be great for elementary and middle school students and can enhance their learning.

Baker, S. C., Wentz, R. K., & Woods, M. M. (2009). Using Virtual Worlds in Education: Second Life as an Educational Tool. *Teaching of Psychology* , 59-64.

In this article, the authors discuss the advantages and disadvantages when using Second Life and look at using Second Life in Education. While an increasing number of students are enrolling in on-line classes and social networking sites are used heavily by students, the authors see Second Life as a benefit to student learning. Online technologies can reach students at home, in their dorms, in between classes and on the weekends. The article states that virtual worlds can be a useful tool in education because of their “ability to engage students and interact when meeting face-to-face is not possible. The authors discussed the global availability of Second Life and discussed how many universities around the world are already using the technology. The article listed some advantages to using Second Life in education such as; teaching students to use a new technology, increasing student engagement and participation in discussions, using Second Life as “a platform for informal interaction between students and staff.” Some of their proposed disadvantages are, “learning time involved, technological requirements and glitches in software, student willingness to try new technology, and security and privacy issues.”

This article gave a nice broad overview of using Second Life in Education. At the end of the article, they provided 10 tips for educators to think about before incorporating Second Life into their curriculum. I also thought they did a nice job outlining the advantages and disadvantages to Second Life. They

proposed a few new ideas that I had not thought of before like using Second Life to hold evening review sessions for exams and having Second Life available to students who may be out of class sick or out of town for some reason. I think there are many ideas that can be looked into further and I look forward to finding out more as I continue my research.