



Learning and Teaching in the virtual world 'Second Life'.

Second Life can provide an efficient virtual teaching environment in which students can access a 3D multi-user educational environment in real time and interact with staff and other students or educational interactive material that has been specifically created for them. This teaching can take place in real time, in the form of virtual lecture, or asynchronously, in the form of programmed objects and activities across several modalities, audio files, streaming video, pictures, text, live interactions with artificial humans or 'bots', quizzes, problem-based learning, student seminars, lecture material, interactive surveys, games, quests, assessments and blended learning with existing web-based resources etc.

The virtual world also acts as a very good forum for students to come together, despite physical location, to reflect on educational material at their own pace. Students control an avatar, in the form of a 3D representation of themselves that can independently move and interact with the entire virtual world Second Life. In an educational context, this means we can provide students with a custom designed and safe environment for them to learn and we can control that environment in a variety of ways to suit our teaching methods and needs.

At University of Derby, for example we have used Second Life to present an optional component of our first year module 'Psychology Skills' using 3D rendered buildings and virtual tools to present core context in text, audio and video. We have also run small group seminars where students are able to conceptualise in 3D the structure of a Psychology lab report. For example, in the virtual world they can easily manipulate the sections of a 3D rendered spidergram that shows the various sections (e.g. Abstract, Introduction, Method...). The ability to reproduce visually the concept of the lab report leads to a better awareness of the structure and relation of each part of the report. Students are able to reflect on their efforts in groups and this leads to much higher levels of immersion with the educational content. There are many other uses of virtual worlds for teaching and learning and the potential is very much limited by the creativity of the educators using it as a tool for deeply immersive learning spaces.

If you have any questions you can contact me via email s.bignell@derby.ac.uk You can access the website for our JISC-funded project here: <http://previewpsych.org>

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