

It's personal; what are the rights and responsibilities of the learner's avatar?

There is an ever-increasing use of virtual worlds where learners explore, experience, communicate and act. These 3D immersive environments, where the learner adopts an avatar and becomes the new persona they devise, are becoming the home for serious learning as well as still retaining their more vicarious activities. This paper examines the issues relating to social justice and inclusion with respect to the safety, well-being, safeguarding, freedom and rights of avatars within a virtual world. It considers what responsibilities exist or should be made explicit when using virtual worlds as the vehicle for learning.

I AM MY AVATAR,
MY AVATAR IS ME

I am beholden by any
promises my Avatar makes
on my behalf and my
Avatar will honour any
contract I make



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Key Points

- The use of virtual worlds is a current and real educational and sociological phenomenon.
- Cyberbullying is a recognised issue. Our learners learn in virtual worlds and therefore we have a duty of care to have safeguarding measures in place.
- There are negative issues in the virtual world including: stalking; bullying; identity theft; prejudice based on appearance/status/quality of avatar; restrictions in freedom of expression (anti-BDSM); etc.
- There are positive opportunities including: exploring identity; enabling experience of others (e.g. exploring in a wheel chair); liberating by removing physical disability; etc.
- All educators, need to consider the issues and have informed opinions.

Bibliography

There are a number of key works relating to learning in virtual worlds. There are fewer considerations of the rights and responsibilities that exist for avatars.

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