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.

Lesley Scopes and John Woollard, School of Education, University of Southampton

Presenters
Lesley Scopes MSc BSc(Hons) PGCE FifL Research Assistant and Visiting Fellow School of Education, University of Southampton

L.Scopes@soton.ac.uk
Second Life: Light Sequent
LinkedIn Lesley Scopes
Skype: Lesley.Scopes

John Woollard PhD MA(Ed) BSc(Hons) PGCE Lecturer in IT Education School of Education, University of Southampton

J.Woollard@southampton.ac.uk
Second Life Stradd Ling
LinkedIn jw7@soton.ac.uk
Skype: Woollard
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.


Wan, Chin-Sheng; Chung, Su-Hsiang; Chiou, Wen-Bin 2009 Contingent impression management in sexual disclosure by older adolescents corresponding in cyberspace: The role of gender dyads Social Behavior and Personality: an international journal, Volume 37, Number 8, , pp. 1023-1032(10) Scientific Journal Publishers