

A sociocultural approach to Second Life

Notes from Christonasi & Plakitsi (2013)

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A **virtual world** or **MUVE** (Multi User Virtual Environment) is a 3D virtual environment that simulates real world objects and interactions between multiple users simultaneously.

MUD (Multi User Dungeon) is another predecessor technology of Second Life; text-based interactive multi user worlds.



Second Life is a large **virtual social world**:

- Shared Space
- Graphical User Interface
- Immediacy
- Persistence
- Socialization/Community

Five elements common to all virtual worlds:

- 1. Purpose** (Content of interaction)
- 2. Place** (Location of interaction)
- 3. Platform** (Design of interaction)
- 4. Population** (Pattern of interaction)
- 5. Profit Model** (Return of interaction)

Second Life in Education

Teacher

- Facilitator who supports students' efforts to discover the knowledge on their own in the virtual world.
- Able to design learning experiences which embody different pedagogies.

Student

- Actively involved in the learning process and knowledge creation.
- Greater responsibility for their projects.

Virtual environments allow **three** kinds of **experiences** that are **not available** in **real life**:

- **Size** (possibility to change sizes of students and objects)
- **Transduction** (possibility to present information not available to human senses)
- **Reification** (possibility to represent objects that have no physical form)

The **benefits** of working in Second Life:

- Immersion
- The fun factor
- Safe environment for learning
- Highly customizable
- Cost advantage
- Intelligent avatars
- Recording and archiving
- Network of educators
- Interactivity

The **drawbacks** of working in Second Life:

- Abstracting real world phenomena may hamper real work learning and transfer.
- The repertoire of body language is not sufficient to mimic human body language.
- Communication requires co-presence (nearby position) for hearing what other people say.
- Mastering the technology requires some time, especially for adjusting audio input/output.
- Sometimes technical difficulties with avatars; they get stuck in repetitive movements.

The sociocultural theory in Second Life

- Social interaction
- Role of play
- Scaffolding

Social interaction

Second Life enables **collaboration** and **social interaction** among learners, as it encourages meaningful communication between users in content-based activities.

[Video Demonstr\Self organized collaboration.mp4](#)

Role play

By playing in virtual worlds users become familiar with social concepts, such as collaboration, sharing and friendship and develop confidence in trying new things.

[Video Demonstr\Students' role playing.mp4](#)

[Video Demonstr\Role play.mp4](#)

According to **Jankowski** (2011) there are four reasons why **virtual role playing** is preferred to real world role playing:

- Participants take their role more serious
- Improved feedback
- Increased realism
- Dynamic scenarios

Scaffolding

Novice learners in Second Life who cannot fully perform the competences on their own can be supported by **more knowledgeable learners** through social interaction.

[Video Demonstr\Guided collaboration.mp4](#)

Questions:

1. According to the video extracts, which scaffolding aspects are you able to identify in Second Life?
2. How is role play organized in the small examples?