



EDITOR'S REMARKS

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Second Life: A Tool for Teacher Educators

Using Second Life as an educational tool is an idea that is rapidly gaining attention and activity in our community. The high visibility of Second Life projects and activities at NECC 2008 was one indication of the growing number of people interested in exploring the potential of Second Life as a tool to expand and enhance student learning experiences. Here at Iowa State University, a group of educators has begun collaborating to explore the potential of Second Life as a tool in higher education, and we expect that similar groups are forming at colleges and universities around the country and the world. The current list of universities, colleges, libraries and museums with a presence in Second Life continues to grow on a daily basis, providing opportunities for collaboration, social networking, and learning within Second Life. Our own SIGTE recently offered a webinar on Second Life.

As most of you know, Second Life is a multi-user virtual environment developed through Linden Labs in San Francisco. Second Life users assume new identities by creating avatars and are able to explore, create, and build within a large variety of environments. These environments provide varied educational opportunities, from visiting the Sistine Chapel to moving around in a human cell. An increasing number of educational institutions and organizations—including ISTE—have a presence in Second Life. ISTE has partnered with Linden Labs to create a New Educators Pilot Program that eases entry into the Second Life environment. Both ISTE and DEN (Discovery Educator's Network), among others, provide professional development opportunities for educators. The Second Life in Education wiki (<http://sleducation.wikispaces.com/secondliferesources>) provides a good resource for educators interested in exploring educational possibilities for Second Life, and a useful introductory video can be found at <http://www.youtube.com/MaryAnnCLT>.

The most exciting applications of the Second Life tool involve using and creating innovative immersive educational environments for learners. As is often true with new technologies, some of the first educational efforts in Second Life merely replicated traditional lecture-based classrooms. A host of avatars could be found lined up in rows listening to the head avatar up in front. For most of us, this type of use of Second Life environments failed to inspire much interest or excitement. More recently, however, educators have created learner-centered sites that provide active and engaging experiences for students. Professional development opportunities are happening while a group of avatars skydive or engage in an underwater scuba activity. Other spaces provide a campfire on a beach or a dance area in a coffee shop as an environment where educators' avatars can network and discuss current issues in the instructional technology field and within their classrooms. The New Media Consortium has also developed a variety of simulation spaces that provide an environment for learning in the health sciences curriculum that would not be available in a traditional learning space.

Clearly, there are some challenges involved in engaging both teacher education and K–12 students in Second Life experiences. The Teen Second Life platform can help address some of the concerns about privacy and inappropriate content, however, and has made Second Life a more viable option for K–12 educators. Universities are paving the way as they build their presence and explore the possibilities of learning within a virtual environment. They have also forged the path for exploring and dealing with issues regarding privacy, copyrights, and safeguarding youth (ages 13–18) that use the Teen Grid within Second Life.

As teacher educators, we need to educate ourselves about some of the possibilities of Second Life applications and begin to design appropriate experiences for our students. Simulations, virtual field trips, and opportunities to speak foreign languages and experience international cultures are all examples of some of the rich possibilities offered by Second Life.

For example, students with disabilities can shed their earthbound limitations and communicate, create, and experience activities that might not be possible outside of the virtual environment that Second Life provides. Two notable groups, the Naughty Auties, a group of individuals who battle autism through virtual interactions and opportunities, and Virtual Ability, a group of people afflicted with multiple sclerosis, provide good examples of the potential of Second Life. Within Second Life, people with special needs can build, create, interact, learn, and play in ways they cannot in their real lives.

NECC 2009 will offer some intriguing possibilities for experiencing Second Life's potential, and attendees can even participate "in world" as well as in person. Perhaps we will "see" some of you in Second Life and/or receive some promising articles on Second Life applications for teacher education!

As educational technology teacher educators, we have a history of working to define and create technology applications that strengthen our work, and Second Life is just one more new possibility for us. Authors in this issue of JCTE describe exploration into several new possibilities for our field. Consistent with our theme of virtual learning, M. D. Roblyer, Marclyn Porter, Talbot Bielefeldt, and Martha Donaldson's article, titled "Teaching Online Made Me a Better Teacher": Studying the Impact of Virtual Course Experiences on Teachers' Face-to-Face Practice," discusses the pedagogical benefits of teaching in virtual environments and suggest that these technologies serve a unique role in informing both online and face-to-face teaching practice. In the article titled "Distributed Collaborative Research Model: Meaningful and Responsive Inquiry in Technology and Teacher Education," Melissa Pierson stresses the need for collaborative research across institutions to create large-scale studies that speak more broadly about the impact of technology on teacher education.

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Melissa Pierson is an associate professor in the Instructional Technology Program and the director of teacher education at the University of Houston. She teaches both undergraduate and graduate students, and both technology and teacher education courses, as a natural way to ensure technology integration. Her current research interests include the integration of technology, pedagogy, and content in teacher education, as well as the use of inquiry and action research to inform novice teachers' technology integration practices. Her scholarship includes books, chapters, articles, and conference presentations in the field of educational technology.

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Pierson documents the lessons learned from past collaborations and details a model for collaborative research. In keeping with the international scope of ISTE, authors Ahmet Naci Çoklar and Hatice Ferhan Odabaşı's article, "Educational Technology Standards Scale (ETSS): A Study of Reliability and Validity on Turkish Preservice Teachers," presents the development of a scale that determines how effectively teachers in Turkey are using the NETS•T. Although the scale was based on the NETS•T 2000, the rigor of their methodology warrants dissemination. And finally, in the article titled "Construct Validity for Teachers' Attitudes Toward Computers Questionnaire," Rhonda Christensen and Gerald Knezek present a well-validated and reliable instrument for teachers' self-appraisal of their attitudes toward computers. Combined, these articles strengthen our knowledge base and offer multiple methods and perspectives to improve the integration of technology into teacher education.