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Mentoring Faculty Through Changing Roles as They Transition into *Second Life*

Abstract

Our presentation aims to equip teachers wishing to teach online in *Second Life* or other virtual environments with both a scheme for thinking about their teaching, and knowledge of the *Second Life* skills that they will need for make their in-world or blended classes effective. This presentation explores the roles changes that teachers need to face when adopting the use of an online world such as *Second Life* for teaching their discipline. This presentation will use Mason's (1991) and Berge's (1995) role cluster theory as a basis for discussing the issues that a faculty person new to *Second Life* will have to work through on their own, or with the help from their instructional designer or faculty support personnel, as they make the transition into teaching in *Second Life*.

Context

Second Life is a virtual, 3-D world, technically a MUVE, (Multi-user Virtual Environment), which now has more than 12 million people registered worldwide (January, 2008) and between 30 thousand and 40 thousand persons logged in at any one time. The opportunities that virtual environments offer in terms of social networking are already well documented (Johnson & Levine, n.d.) , and now the focus is shifting to how *Second Life* can be exploited for educational purposes. *Second Life* offers an instant opportunity to interact with residents based around the world, and there are endless possibilities to practice language and explore inter-cultural ideas in an informal learning context. The in-world experience is immersive, and approximates real life to a closer degree than any other Virtual Learning Environment, and it therefore offers great potential for learning higher level skills and to offer a more internationalised form of learning. The social aspect of virtual worlds is beginning to be recognized for educational purposes[1] and many universities, colleges and libraries are establishing presences there. This, together with the scope that *Second Life* offers for embedding autonomous, interactive learning activities framed in a 3-D world, also provides potential for exciting and engaging a range of different types of learners, both in higher education and Pre-Kindergaten-12. Second Life has both an adult grid and a '*Teen Grid*." On the *Teen Grid* residents are limited to those between 13 and 18 years of age and carefully screened adults.

Major Aspects

Changing Faculty Roles
However, the issues surrounding the changing roles of faculty that Robin Mason (1991) and Zane Berge (1995) identified that come into play as faculty move from facilitators of learning/discussion in the classroom to a mediated environment still hold true. Mason and Berge were discussing the faculty role changes inherent in the move from classroom to online learning, in an era of simple email and email discussion lists - Mason prior to the advent of the Web, and Berge in its infancy. While the technologies may have changed, the basic principles have not.

Mason defined the three main faculty role clusters of organizational, social and intellectual, and Berge reworked and re-defined the role clusters that a facilitator of online discussion/online learning has to fill as:

- Pedagogical (intellectual; task)
- Managerial (organizational; procedural; administrative)
- Social
- Technical

Second Life is perceived as being a totally novel media for teaching and learning. From our work in *Second Life*, it has become apparent that it is functionally equivalent to a blend of real life classroom and a still primitive learning management system. The same four role clusters must be addressed, albeit in a somewhat different manner, when a teacher decides to adopt this media for their in-world or blended courses.

So what does teaching in Second Life look and feel like?
Picture a 'traditional learning' setting in *Second Life*...The teacher is standing at the front of the class with the PowerPoint presentation displayed behind them and the students sitting around in front, listening intently as their voice-enabled teachers drones on. The teacher proceeds with the lecture and advances through the presentation as she goes. Students have been given their handouts to work on later with their home work. This doesn't look so very different from a real-life, face-to-face environment. However, there are a whole new range of issues within each of Berge's role clusters that relate to virtual worlds in particular. Each role has a range of tasks or questions that the instructor will need to consider when designing and developing their class. We consider that a faculty person, coming into *Second Life* from the classroom, is going to face these same kinds of issues - just perhaps with an emphasis on the technical, if you include manipulating their avatar and their teaching tools. This presentation will discuss these role clusters and use them as a basis for determining what a faculty person new to *Second Life* will have to work through on their own, or with the help from instructional designers or faculty support personnel as they make the transition into teaching in *Second Life*.

Pedagogical
Certainly, some of the most important roles of online discussion moderator/tutor revolves around their duties as an educational facilitator. The moderator uses questions and probes for student responses that focus discussions on critical concepts, principles and skills (Berge 1995).

Pedagogical:Transition to SL

- What are special considerations of teaching in SL?
- What kind of learning spaces are available? Do they already exist, or must the instructor create them?
- What are useful primary presentation/teaching tools?
- Are these necessarily the most effective teaching tools that could be used?
- How do you design a course/modules for presentation in SL? Design backwards, starting with the learning outcomes.
- What are examples of the way courses are being taught? Become a student in SL before you become a teacher, and try a number of different classes and learning venues to experience a range of possibilities.
- What's a good balance between a teacher teaching and student's active learning?
- How will the timing of your class work? Will it be timed as one single unit of one hour or will you run your class to comprise of 1 hour of learning over a week?
- Is all the activity synchronous? Is it possible that a students can catch up asynchronously by themselves?
- Are all your activities in world synchronous or can some be asynchronous?
- What;s a good balance between activity and reflection?

Managerial
This role involves setting the agenda for the conference: the objectives of the discussion, the timetable, procedural rules and decision-making norms. Managing the interactions with strong leadership and direction is considered a sine qua non of successful conferencing (Berge 1995).

Managerial Transition to SL

- How do you manage an course or a meeting in *Second Life*? Who does the set up?
- What are some of the ways you can arrange the meeting space? Traditional class, sandbox, woodland, skybox, exploring. Have a list of language related resources, places to explore)
- Given that *Second Life* is not a comprehensive learning management system and that other tools may already be in place in your institution: what is your balance among the going to be? (e.g. Blackboard or other institutional Learning Management System (LMS); email; discussion lists; phone conferences etc.)?
- What is the proportion of your activities are asynchronous/synchronous?
- Have you considered these activities both in-world and out-world? How will students move between the two?
- How would you go about using both *Second Life* and your LMS effectively, still ensuring a satisfying

experience with both existing resources and SL?

- What plants do you make to help your students when they miss some of their class-time due to technical difficulty?

Social

Creating a friendly, social environment in which learning is promoted is also essential for successful moderating. This suggests "promoting human relationships, developing group cohesiveness, maintaining the group as a unit, and in other ways helping members to work together in a mutual cause," are all critical to success of any conferencing activities (Berge, 1995).

Social:Transition to SL

- How are you, as a teacher, going to present yourself to your students, via your choice of name, avatar, clothing, etc.?
- How much and what kind of information will you share with your students in your in-world profile?
- How will you choose your *Second Life* name? (e.g. an Italian sounding name may encourage Italian speakers to approach you. This is a desirable affect for those studying languages. Does it matter if you call yourself Mooface or HunnyBunny or what might, in other situations, be a derogatory term? If so, why?
- What impact will it have on your credibility as a teacher if you choose a different gender for your avatar, or choose to be a 'furry', a robot, a gnome, a space alien or one of "Grendel's Children"?
- Will you have rules regarding what student avatars look like and wear?
- How are you going to facilitate discussion - Is there a 'raise your hand to speak animation? Is such formality really an aid to learning?
- How are you going to keep your students interested and engaged (i.e. make a "connection" with each one?)
- How are you going to manage griefing? (The *Second Life* equivalent of "flaming" in discussion forums)
- What are the steps you are going to take to acculturate your students into the *Second Life* learning environment?
- How will you encourage well mannered learners? How will you ensure that they are cognisant with general in-world manners? Do you have a code of conduct?

- What benefits might there be in social networking?

Technical

The facilitator must make participants comfortable with the system and the software that the conference is using. The ultimate technical goal for the instructor is to make the technology transparent. When this is done, the learner may concentrate on the academic task at hand (Berge, 1995).

Technical:Transition to *Second Life*

- What do you absolutely HAVE to know in order to work within the SL software?
- How are you going to get technical support?
- How are you going to provide technical support for your students?
- Are you going to provide "cheat sheets"? In what format? In-world, or in real life, or both?
- What are your alternatives if something goes wrong? (i.e. What if voice doesn't work that day? What if the Second Life grid is offline when it is time for class to start?
- Does your faculty support your *Second Life* teaching?
- How can you support other members of your faculty or institution get started in SL?

While Second Life may appear to be a completely novel learning medium, the teachers and the students bring all their real-life characteristics with them into this new situation - so many of the basic considerations have not changed - and role cluster theory is a useful way to frame this discussion.

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