Chapter 11

Learning Problem-Solving Strategies in Virtual Worlds That Encourage People to Respect Human Rights

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ABSTRACT

This chapter will discuss educational projects for learning problem-solving strategies in virtual worlds that encourage people to respect human rights as a lifelong learning experience. The discussion includes philosophical issues concerning the need to design new models for virtual learning that engage a person's own ways of thinking and interacting with the educational content. For example, the instructional design for these projects is based on adapting the think aloud and means-end analysis research methods for evaluating how learning about human rights in a virtual environment might transfer to the real-world community. The projects have been presented over the past 10 years in the virtual worlds of Second Life and the Open Sims.

INTRODUCTION

How can people choose to act in ways that respect human rights in a 21st century global society?

Whether our information is represented as images on cave walls thousands of years ago, or in contemporary 3D virtual worlds, the kind of knowledge that encourages a person to choose humanitarian values is not well understood. For example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations in 1948 with the hope of preventing crimes against humanity that occurred during World War II. However, seventy years later dictators and terrorists continue to threaten our lives and can now communicate their plans through the internet and social media.

At the same time, information technology could create new possibilities for people to learn problem-solving strategies to explore ideas about human rights in a virtual world and discover guidelines for their

expression in the real world community. This chapter will discuss the projects designed by the author and her colleagues in the virtual worlds of Second Life and the Open Sims that offer this kind of education (Bennett & Patrice, 2013; Bennett, 2017; De Leon & Bennett, (in press). The discussion will include;

1. The philosophy and rationale for the educational content, instructional design, and research methods for evaluating the virtual learning experience.
2. Descriptions of example projects.
3. Summary and suggestions for future virtual education about human rights.

BACKGROUND

Educational Content and Instructional Design

The Educational Content

The projects involve learning about the thirty universal human rights listed by the United Nations by exploring problem-solving strategies that assist in translating these ideals into individual and community actions. (see Appendix for a description of these rights).

For example, Eleanor Roosevelt asks people to think about how to bring humanitarian values into their daily life in her community guide entitled, *In Your Hands.*

Where after all do human rights begin? In small places, close to home -- so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any map of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person, the neighborhood he lives in, the school or college he attends, the factory, farm or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world (Roosevelt, 1958).

A virtual world offers the chance to learn about a subject at both a conceptual level of knowledge and as an immediate sensory experience. This is important for understanding the meaning of human rights in ways that can be expressed as a philosophical inquiry, as well as how they affect daily life relationships.

The Instructional Design

When a person uses an Avatar designed to represent them in the virtual world, there is the opportunity to learn and share information as a real time interaction. To take part in an immersive experience that includes the possibility of communicating through voice, text, images, and animation. Educational content can be offered in the form of stories, science, art, games, theater, lectures and new genres invented for a digital Metaverse. The person/Avatar can also connect to information from video, web sites, and social media. Over the past ten years, the author and her colleagues have designed places in the virtual worlds where a person represented by their Avatar can try out problem-solving strategies that encourage the expression of human rights. (see the references for the virtual world project locations.)

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