Chapter 12
Second Life and World of Warcraft:
Harnessing Presence Learning

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the potential both Second Life (SL) and World of Warcraft (WoW) as instances of a virtual world (VW) and a massively multi-player online role-playing game (MMORPG), respectively, have for leveraging presence learning. The latter encapsulates, in this chapter, presence pedagogy, tele-presence, co-presence, social presence, and cognitive presence as mediated by both SL and WoW. In this context, this chapter contends that both SL and WoW help harness presence learning. Against this background, the chapter first provides a brief overview of SL, WoW, and presence learning. Second, it presents and discusses seven case studies demonstrating how both SL and WoW help harness presence learning. Third and last, the chapter outlines future trends for presence learning in respect of both SL and WoW.

INTRODUCTION

As instances of a virtual world (VW) and a massively multi-player online role-playing game (MMORPG) respectively, both Second Life (SL) and World of Warcraft (WoW) have, within a relatively short time span, been studied from different perspectives. Correspondingly, the many and varied affordances they respectively offer, have also been a subject of much research recently. That is, the applications of these two forms of social presence technologies have, in various ways, been investigated in: the business domain (Ellis, Luther, Bessière & Kellogg, 2008; International Business

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Machines [IBM], 2007; Mennecke, Hassall & Triplett, 2008); the government sector (Smith, 2009; Wyld, 2008); and the higher education sector (Helmer & Light, 2007; Palomäki, 2009; Thomas & Brown, 2009). In this regard, some of the educational affordances offered by both SL and WoW that have been examined in varying degrees include the following:

- educational islands, and in-world or in-game learning (islands meant for education in SL, and learning taking place within SL and WoW respectively)
- situated, experiential, and simulated learning (customized learning, learning tapping into experience, and learning based on simulation)
- problem- and project-based learning (learning driven by designated problems and projects)
- observational and virtual action learning (learning involving observation and action learning taking place online)
- role-playing and avatar-assisted learning (learning involving role-playing and learning taking place through avatars) (see Dickenson, Pedler & Burgoyne, 2007; IBM, 2007; Mennecke et al., 2008; Papp, 2010; Salt, Atkins & Blackall, 2008; Steinkuehler, 2007; Thomas & Brown, 2009).

In particular, these two social presence technologies have been applied and harnessed in fields such as business management/administration, software engineering, physics, medicine, forensic science, literature, and language learning (see Salt et al., 2008). Thus, in this context, it can be argued that these two forms of technologies lend themselves well to being employed in any disciplinary area and in almost any social sphere. And the educational affordances they offer are virtually boundless. It is against this backdrop that this chapter sets out to investigate the way that both SL and WoW help harness presence learning. The latter encompasses, inter alia, presence pedagogy, tele-presence, co-presence, social presence, and cognitive presence as mediated by SL and WoW. Based on this, the chapter consists of the following main sections: Second Life, World of Warcraft, and presence learning: an overview; SL and WoW: harnessing presence learning; and future trends.

Second Life, World of Warcraft, and Presence Learning: An Overview

Second Life - also regarded as a multi-user virtual environment (MUVE) - is a persistent three-dimensional (3D) digital virtual world (VW) developed and launched in 2003 by Linden Lab. It is more of a metaverse than a massively multi-player online role-playing game (MMORPG) albeit it has in-world games such as Crossing the Ravine (*see Figure 1*), Tower of Babble and Castle Builder (see Ellis et al., 2008). In this case, it is almost a champion lode of VWs. Some of its distinctive features are as follows:

- an open-ended virtual environment for multiple uses and purposes
- a neutral framework allowing for user-created content (e.g., custom hair and clothing, dance animations, buildings, furniture, fireworks, and flora and fauna) and user creativity and innovation
- a visualization of ideas and concepts in a 3D format that leads to new insights and deeper learning
- an allowance for the manipulation of the in-worlds such as action scripting, object construction and virtual trading
- its own virtual currency (Linden dollars or L$) – that can be exchanged for real US dollars - and its own virtual economy
- the potential for parallel multiple virtual environments (e.g., multiple in-worlds, islands, or regions)
- a diversity of views and opinions