Chapter 3
Constructivist and Constructionist Approaches to Graduate Teaching in Second Life:
Ethical Considerations and Legal Implications

R. S. Talab
Kansas State University, USA

Hope R. Botterbusch
Kansas State University, USA

ABSTRACT

As a growing number of faculty use constructivist and constructionist approaches to teaching in SL, little research exists on the many ethical considerations and legal implications that affect course development. Following the experiences of the instructor and five students, their 12-week journey is documented through interviews, journals, blogs, weekly course activities, SL class dialogs, and in-world assignments. Additionally, five faculty and staff experts who taught or trained in SL at this university were also interviewed and consulted. Ethical considerations in constructivist and constructionist teaching were time, appearance, skills, scaffolded instruction, playful exploration, vicarious experience, self-directed project development, construction of objects, constructivism and constructionism balance, social networking and collaboration, harassment and griefing, false identities and alternate avatars, chat log sharing, and copyright and trademark violations. Lessons learned included developing scaffolded pedagogical approaches that moved from direct teaching to constructivism and constructionism, and required faculty and student adherence to the SL TOS, Community Standards, and Intellectual Property policy.

SECOND LIFE USES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Second Life is a virtual world in which inhabitants engage in a variety of rich sensory experiences that allow them to express themselves and co-construct their learning experiences through active engagement in simulations (Antonacci & Modress, 2008), role-plays (Gao, Jeongmin, & Koehler, 2009; Mayrath, Scanchez, Traphagan, Heikes, & Trivedi, 2007), modeling complex scenarios (Gourlay & Tombs, 2009), exploration (Boudreau, Headley, & Ashford, 2009), and solving authentic problems (Muldoon & Kofoed, 2009) (Figure 1).

Linden Labs' Second Life Multiple User Virtual Environment (MUVE), launched in 2003, is the preeminent "in-world" environment for those 18 and over, with over 31,000 regions (Second Life Wiki, 2010), an average of 589,000 unique users a month, and $133,000 U.S. dollars in transactions a day (Shepard, 2010; Second Life Economic Statistics, 2010). Membership is free, though one must agree to the Terms of Service when downloading the program. Avatars are lifelike, photo-realistic, and customizable. Genitalia are usually purchased for an additional cost, but are also found at free marketplaces within Second Life. Second Life (SL) has an income that rivals small countries. With hundreds of universities worldwide in SL, (Second Life Blogs, 2009) and total membership at roughly 1 million, SL is a powerful platform for teaching and learning (Dede, 1997; Tennesen, 2009).

University faculty are using SL for teaching, recruitment, and professional development in greater numbers, worldwide, as they wrestle with what constitutes proper pedagogy (Appel, 2006; Boudreau, Headley, & Ashford, 2009; DiRamio, 2005; Felix, 2005). Some faculty continue to prefer to contain students in an SL classroom that imitates brick-and-mortar buildings and teach traditionally with PowerPoint, fearing potential ethical issues and resulting legal problems that

Figure 1. Chichen Itza at sunrise

could result from students exploring and building freely. However, a growing number of faculty favor a more active, student-centered and engaged approach to teaching (Hung; Tan & Koh, 2006; Jonassen, 2000; Neely, Bowers, & Ragas, 2010) that involves exploration, student-centered learning, and construction.

In SL one is only limited by ones' imagination. Students can create buildings, jewelry, vehicles, clothing, three-dimensional representations of ideas, historical recreations, new worlds, artistic creations, operating room labs, and flights of fancy that would be too expensive or impossible in the real world, (Antonacci & Modress, 2008; Wang & Hsu, 2008; Wongtangswad, 2010). However, the more interesting and useful a virtual world becomes then the more challenges that arise with it (Figure 2).

With real money exchanged into "Lindens" for goods and services, housing in areas with covenants, universities, businesses, commerce, clubs, educational and business associations, SL has all the same elements of virtual society that exist in the real one, including the potential for unethical and criminal behavior. Consequently, in taking advantage of all the elements of Second Life as a teaching platform, faculty must provide guidance on ethical behavior, and resulting con-

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