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August 2008

TITLE: REAL LIFE SECOND LIFE®; CONTEMPORARY LEARNERS AND LEARNING RELATIONSHIPS

Abstract:

The authors, aka ‘Enigma’ and ‘Lulu’ have identified opportunities to explore new teaching practice and methodologies within the virtual learning environment. Both authors are academics within the School of Design and are embarking on developing a virtual Fashion and Lifestyle university within a virtual environment promoting early adoption and integration of e-learning and the VLE into the curriculum.

Both authors have recognized the growth and popularity of virtual societies and the addictive nature of becoming a resident in such a world; these worlds presented much more than just gaming opportunities, with the potential for both teaching and learning development and collaborative social integration to come together. This potential has yet to be fully explored particularly in the creative industries which has led the authors to consider and identify contemporary learners and learning relationships.

The purpose of this paper is to identify new and emerging ‘learner types’ within the specific subject disciplines of fashion & lifestyle. Academic communities need to understand and embrace the ‘next generation learner’, questioning what the future student might look like and how they might learn, or even want to learn.
An emerging trend for pedagogic practice within the VLE is evident. New learner types will be identified through investigation of both student and staff perceptions and the varying approaches to teaching and learning relationships. Cultural triangulation maps lifestyle influences, ethnographic swings and accessibility via technological influences.

“Another recent trend is the shift from focusing on the organisation and provision of learning content to how learning activities are planned and delivered”.


Students engage readily with on line resources where participation is key, such as Moodle™, Blackboard™ and MyCourse™, and the wider appeal of Myspace™ and Facebook, etc. All of these encourage a sense of collaboration and community which now needs to be embraced through teaching and learning practice.

“Just look at Global Kids. They’re overcoming the digital divide. ”


Introduction

Virtual Worlds in Existence: MUVE’s - Multi-User Virtual Environments:

- There™
- Kaneva™
- Playstation Home™
- Football Superstars™
- Habbo™
- Second Life™
- Whyville™
- ActiveWorlds™
- HiPiHi™
- Gaia Online™

**Whyville™** - A social learning world aimed at 8-15 year olds with around 2.4 million registered users, a social learning network in a virtual world!

**Habbo™** - A social learning world aimed at 13-16 year olds with around 80 million registered users, a social learning network in a virtual world!

**Second Life®** - A social networking world aimed at adults with around 9 million registered users worldwide, a world where adults network, build and create their own virtual environments!

These statistics highlight how we can begin to predict the huge boom that is yet to hit our traditional world. The 13-16 year old markets are currently accounting for the largest proportion globally of users of virtual world environments, more than all the users of the 'adult' worlds put together!

In 2007 UCAS (University Central Admissions Service, UK) launched a virtual island in Second Life® to assist applicants through the clearing system. The island aims to be a recreational space; an open air festival feel is achieved where unsigned bands play music to help the applicant relax.

The onset of the A-TECH REVOLUTION (Academic Technological Revolution) is now broadening the learning & teaching opportunities for both staff and students from a broad global perspective. The virtual learning environment narrows the gap between old school academia and the new 'TECHNO PLUG N PLAY' generation and
is about to transform the way we all disseminate and consume knowledge. Active
learning is the key.

“Participation in the A-Tech revolution is not an option but a matter of urgent
need.” Professor John Rees, Southampton Solent University, 2008

The world we live in is going through a cultural transformation which is
embracing THE SOCIAL META-VERSE, where social collaboration, sensory
perceptions, interconnectivity and experiential (active) life long learning are key to
stimulating development of new and innovative pedagogic practice via advanced
tools of communication. Web 2.0 media is about recognising interactivity and
richer engagement; a two way channel of communication through blogs, wiki’s,
forums, social networking sites that thrive on accessible user interfaces such as
Facebook™, Bebo™, Youtube™, ebay™ etc. The virtual learning arena provides
educators with a platform for scenario building, role-play, experimentation and
simulation, encouraging collaborative and interactive learning activities in a
socially inclusive environment. Students are able to learn within a community led
environment where they can interact with people from a diverse range of cultural,
social and geographical settings of which no perceived barriers present themselves.

Colm O’Brien of IBM comments below of how virtual worlds are assisting this
idea of inclusion. “IBM believes that virtual worlds are going to be the next big
evolution of the web and if this happens…it is not right for blind people to be
missing out on what the rest of us have available” Colm O’Brien of IBM, Virtual
worlds open up to the blind by Adam Spink, BBC News, 18.09.2007.

Recognising the 'VIRTUAL U'

Methodologies used by the Fashion Forecasting and Trend Prediction Industries,
Lifestyle Consumer and Advertising agencies adopt a 'crystal ball' approach to consider a process of estimation and demand planning which then triangulates across social change, lifestyle influences and new media technologies. Introducing and implementing these research methodologies from a pedagogic perspective has led to interpretation and investigation of how new and emerging learner types may look.

**THE ‘VIRTUAL U’** describes the importance of ‘self’ and applies to the fusing of both teacher and learner. A learner controlled environment offering a truly blended approach to learner engagement. The virtual ‘U’ fits with the 'life style pleasure mix' where social confidence and inter-reality can be what the learner wants it to be. Martin Raymond of The Future Laboratory talks of ‘The Future Generations’; The Slash/Slash generation and the new Mass Affluents in their Spring 2008 Trend Briefing paper.

"**The Slash/Slash Generation** - Perhaps one of the most influential and culturally savvy youth groups ever! They don’t just design clothes but style, dj, present and act and have no qualms about putting their image ‘out there’." Martin Raymond, Future Laboratory, 2008

"**New Mass Affluents** - The UK ’s dominant masstige consumers are among our highest earners, with salaries upwards of £70k. NMAs are protective of their wealth and place and increasingly high emphasis on value, service and a one-to-one approach. ” Martin Raymond, Future Laboratory, 2008

**MULTIPLE TRIANGULATION**

Primary research into teens, student and academic perceptions provides the
underpinning evidence that suggests these early predictions of the value of experiential and active learning within a virtual environment are the subject for current topical debate. No longer is knowledge a one-way street nor information mutually exclusive to the 'teacher'. Educators need to provide visible value if they are to be valued?

Marc Prensky writes, “Our students have changed radically. Today's students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach.”

(Marc Prensky 2001)

Jessica Pykett and Tash Lee, Futurelab, 2007 writes:

Steve Moss, Assistant Education Director for Partnerships for Schools and responsible for the Building Schools of the Future Programme in the UK at Future Lab's 'Spaces, Places and Future Learning' conference, November 2006 spoke of “the need in the 21st Century learning environment to blend physical and virtual spaces….”. Steve argued that 'technology could not be seen as a panacea for educational problems ” and emphasis should be placed on “reconceptualising pedagogy from an imaginative and questioning position”.

Exploring the potential of the 'A-TECH REVOLUTION'

To investigate the notion of what a 'new learner type' might begin to look like a small research study of 13yrs - 16yrs, final year undergraduate students and academics involved in teaching was carried out by way of a questionnaire titled, 'Learning in a Virtual World'.

A. When asked how they enjoy learning, the students valued active and
experiential learning ie 'learning by doing'. Interaction with peers/teachers and visual learning were also of great importance.

- Doing something active, being able to experiment and try things out yourself.
- I enjoy visual learning and learning through doing.
- Interacting with lecturer and peers in small groups.

B. When asked how students learn best the contrast in answers highlighted the differences in perception by both academics and students. 41.7% of students felt that interacting with the lecturer was most important whereas only 33.3% of academics felt this to be the case. A further contrast can be found in the area of group discussion where only 12.5% of academic teachers felt students learn best in this way whereas 25% of students felt it was an important way of learning. Both academic teachers and students acknowledge that listening to lectures is not the way students learn best.

**Academic Teacher**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening to lectures</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interacting with lecturer</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interacting with Peers</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group discussion</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>37.5</td>
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Total responses: 24
### Student

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<th>Method</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Responses</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Listening to lectures</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interacting with lecturer</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interacting with Peers</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group discussion</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total responses:** 36

**Fig 1.** How do you think students learn best?

C. Students were asked who is it most important to discuss their learning and ideas with. 69.4% said that their lecturer was the most important. This was followed by industry professionals and then by peers. The academic teacher, by contrast, placed the lecturer first at 41.7% and peers at 29.2%. The academic teachers did not mention industry professionals

> Tutors are important when it comes to discussing ideas. If they can support your ideas it gives me confidences in my creative ability

> Lecturers can help aid and develop your ideas

> Having ideas from other students as they have a lot to share

D. Research indicates that around 78% of students think that computer gaming and social networking could be used to help their learning. Examples were given highlighting the value of social net working as learning and communication tool.
Fig 2. Do you think that computer gaming and social networking could be used to help your learning?

Second life and facebook gives students a chance to interact about projects and fashion...you can talk to people you would not necessarily see everyday and meet new people who are studying similar subjects and you can discuss ideas and courses.

By sharing knowledge and discussing ideas.

Social networking can help open out student to be more confident and open to chat with people, this will help their communication skills. And will also help gaining more network for future purpose. computer gaming, is another link of helping others to communicate in a relaxed enjoyable environment.

70% of academic teachers agreed with the students questioned, but within the commentary, the academic teachers were more cautious of the learning activities and methodologies. This indicates that academic teachers may be slower to embrace the learning potential, benefits and uses of these new media interfaces.

It's a fashion and should only be used to complement learning.
Too much fun within the classroom environment can cause the students to think it was a bit of fun, students may lose interest, course would lose reputation with regard to teaching.

It's a fashion and is not sustainable. Facebook is great but you get bored with it. plus you always have to be on a computer to participate.

We as academics need to consider the importance of 'NOW' as this evidence needs to be recognised and used to implement change as the 'A-TECH GENERATION', (HABBO - 13yr -16yrs) will soon be upon us.

E. The results from our research highlight the trend towards 'open learning' and 'flexible learning'. Sharing and reflecting with self and others and the flexibility to learn any time any place prove to be the most popular learning methods. We are two years away from the 'A-Tech Generation' (HABBO - 13yr -16yrs) entering UK Higher Education when 'en mass' the use of new virtual technologies will be an assumed part of the learning mix.

A. Use of Technology NOW!(selfish learner)
B. Flexibility to learn any time any place (casual learner)
C. Sharing/reflecting with self and others (open learner)
D. Other

Fig 3. As a learner what is most important to you?
F. When asked What does 'Learning in a New World' mean to you? The commentary from under graduate students illustrated that some are already beginning to foresee the benefits of change and integration of new technologies within the curriculum.

*I would think is a new way of learning, to help student find the best and most comfortable way of studying*

*Understanding and adapting to new technology and a new way of life- accepting change*

*Being faced with something totally new which may mean different learning techniques and methods*

THE 'A-TECH GENERATION' - IDENTIFIED LEARNER TYPES

We have identified three main learner types that reflect characteristics of future learners; the Techno Plug 'n' Play (Selfish Learner), the Free Range Learner (Casual Learner), the Wiki Worlder (Open Learner). The common denominator of all three is that they are all users of Phase 4 Media Technologies. We are in a world where this A-Tech Generation have grown accustomed to living in such an experiential, dynamic and wireless world where real time hyper-connectivity and mixed reality is the norm. The A-Tech Generation will see their learning as a multi-dimensional process that involves them in a range of learning situations, enterprise will be a recognized skill.
NEW LEARNER TYPES - Attributes

Techno Plug 'n' Play Generation (Selfish Learner)

This learner has their finger on the pulse, they know what they want and they want it now. Their global perspective on life forms an intrinsic part of the life style they chose to lead. Their ‘techno’ genes ensures they are ‘switched on’ 24/7 showing ‘SPOD’ like characteristics as and when it suits them. They spend quality time in their SPOD PIT cruising the net unwittingly becoming a compulsive hoarder of useful and useless information. This ‘surface’ approach mixes routine daily living with the dynamic capabilities of WEB 2.0 media and the immersive environments of virtual worlds.
The immediacy of these interfaces appeal particularly to the 'Plug 'n' Play' learner. Importance is placed on social networking to form part of the vehicle to assist in the learning process, an expansion of collaborative opportunities, where there are no global limitations. Everything has to be easy, the quicker the better.... if not yesterday! This tech savvy generation has no patience for yesterdays’ technologies. Only the latest gadgets will do and they MUST work and fit expectation, if not they are unceremoniously 'dumped'. They ‘fast forward’ to the next ultimate entertainment tool to feed their impatient hunger for the next big thing. Learning must be entertaining, fast, fun, valuable and rewarding.

- Connectivity
- Interactivity
- Global thinkers
- Immediacy
- Exposure
- Freedom
- Networking (own terms)
- Insular/own world
- Currency

The Free Range Learner (Casual Learner)

Serious players in the learning world where a personal and bespoke learning journey is a priority. Scheduling their daily lives and activities around managing their aspirations and personal learning portfolio. They are in tune with their strengths and limitations. A skilled thinker who researches and invents as they go along in their busy schedule, seeking guidance on a 'need to know' basis. They are a
self sufficient learner and graze enough information to keep the knowledge bank topped up.

This free range approach allows them to set their own learning limits and negotiate from an individual perspective how to stay on track with their personal expectations. This learner thrives on a range of learning situations where personal preference blends the academic environment, the workplace and community which allows alignment with their lifestyle ambitions. This reflects the “any time /any place” mentality where time has no boundaries and allows for ultimate efficiency.

The technologies utilised by this learner are gaming, pod casting, social networks and blogs etc, used in a measured way and to enhance and merge the real and virtual worlds with real life connectivity. Personal time management is key, where blended opportunities blur the boundaries of where lifestyle stops and learning starts. The experiential nature of this rich environment is blended to a point so far as to become a second reality to the casual learner.

- Flexibility
- Blended
- Inclusion
- Timeless (any time any place)
- No boundaries
- Debate
- Second Reality
- Ability to switch on and off
- Grazers
- Efficient
Wiki Worlders - By Learners for Learners (Open Source Learner)

A knowledge driven learner who thrives on absorbing knowledge within an environment saturated with like-minded learners. Live-streaming media, webcasts, blogs, social networks and wikis' are everyday tools for these learners, such tools are used for recording their lives, creating experiences, self promotion and to encourage the involvement of others.

They are part of the advanced knowledge economy, consumers of knowledge from the day they are born, producers of knowledge from the moment they are able. These learners are now credible, enterprising individuals and stake holders of the new knowledge exchange.

They thrive on interaction and participation with like-minded people and openly participate in debate and discussion to evolve ideas, create and invent with limitless potential. This non-centered approach to life-long learning provides unlimited sharing opportunities, and a generous ethos that becomes embedded in the thinking of the open learner. They are information gatherers, a thinking learner keen to adopt new ideas and seek change at the earliest opportunity. The wiki-worlder is like a knowledge tree, a stake holder in the future world, continually absorbing, growing and spreading new knowledge and emergent themes because learning is ‘for learners by learners’ and must be participatory, experiential and inclusive.

- Dissemination
- Participation
- Knowledge exchange
- Producers of Knowledge
- Consumers of Knowledge
- Collective
- Evolving
- Currency
- Non-centred
- Generous
- Ability to reflect with self and others
- Willingness to ask & answer
- Peer to peer

These identified new learners have some characteristics that blend across all types, all are accustomed to using Phase 4 Media Technologies, using these for their learning is 'obvious' to them. This is not however obvious to the current generation of academics. More emphasis is needed to break down the barriers and limitations that are thrown up by skills shortages, a blinkered view of innovative pedagogic practice and a lack of willingness to embrace this.

**THE SOCIAL METAVERSE** provides opportunities to create virtual spaces that incarnate into lecture theatres, cinema, galleries, auditorium, performance, stage & catwalk. Areas for display, design, build, film making etc together with workshop facilitation. Role-play scenarios, social spaces, virtual exchange programmes, buy, sell & trade centres (IPR - Real economies!) and learning resource centres & libraries offer real time dynamic (virtual) possibilities within the social metaverse. The benefits of embracing these multiple platforms are membership, integration, a sense of community and social belonging. Role-play is inclusive where team work, negotiation skills, customer service, management skills
and creative thinking can be valued, tested and exercised. Support for International students and students with disabilities can be explored in a variety of contexts, scenarios and outcomes. Research opportunities, information sharing, networking, experimentation and the ability to reflect with self and others is clear and one that the academic community can benefit from.

DEVELOPING LEARNING SCENARIOS IN A VIRTUAL WORLD: 'U-LABs'.

(Stage 3)

We now need to look to how we provide students with an educational platform where the boundaries of learning, lifestyle and fun are blurred. The ultimate learning scenario where active learning forms part of the learning mix. We have outlined below a small sample of learning scenarios set in a virtual environment (U-Labs) that are being developed with academics from the School of Design at Southampton Solent University. These will now be expanded upon and implemented as the next stage of this research and trialed in the Solent Life Campus in Second Life®.

**U-Lab 1 - Merchandising product through Retail Display.**

Learners can discuss, debate and review product ranges, design and plan retail display and merchandise product in an e-trade environment.

**U-Lab 2 - Interior & Sensory Spaces**

Learners can develop design ideas, explore proportion, colour and texture. Sensory perception and ambient space can be contemporary or traditional. Immediate feedback can be sought stimulated through discussion and debate via teachers, peers or industry.

**U-Lab 3 - Exploring personal criteria**
Learners can be the creators of self-image or explore new identity.

**U-Lab 4 - Virtual portfolio**

A platform for students to display and exhibit work to a global audience.

**U-Lab 5 - Induction**

Students can meet in a virtual world where ice-breaking exercises can be developed, scenarios can be staged in formats that all learners can access.

"The future has already happened; it's just not very evenly distributed"

*William Gibson, Science Fiction Author and Journalist.*
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Acknowledgements:

Research funded by the Centre for Advanced Scholarship in Art & Design,
Southampton Solent University.
Solent Life Fashion & Lifestyle Virtual Campus: Funded by TQEF (Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund) 2008

Thanks are given to Professor John Rees, Faculty of Technology, Southampton Solent University and the staff and students who contributed to our research.