# Chapter XXVII
# The Usefulness of Second Life for Language Learning

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## ABSTRACT

*Within academia, distance learning as an approach to education has its share of skeptics. Regardless of how some feel about the methodology, it has become a viable alternative to more traditional classroom instruction. In fact, distance learning methods such as learning management systems, video conferencing, and CD-ROM programs can yield success in second or foreign language courses as well. While those other computer-based learning tools have produced positive results, this study attempts to gauge the usefulness of an Internet-based virtual reality environment called Second Life. This virtual world, not initially intended for second or foreign language teaching, contains environments that are similar to those found in the "real world" that can be manipulated by users for educational purposes. The subjects in this study—three students in an introductory German class and students of two semesters of composition—45 in number, all felt that Second Life helped their language progression and/or helped inspire their writing. All wanted to see expanded use of Second Life in their classes.*

## INTRODUCTION

Everett Rogers (2003) first described how people adopt and embrace change in his book *Diffusion of Innovations*. Rogers stated that members of a society do not accept new ideas all at once. Instead, the adoption of innovations resembles that of a bell-shaped curve. The innovators are a small percentage of people who bring about change. The early and late majority of adopters

comprise the bulk of society. And, lastly, the laggards—those who either never accept a new idea or are the last to do so—make up another small percentage. While Rogers used his bell curve to describe economics and consumerism, it can certainly be used in other areas as well, especially education.

The trend in education tends to be that a very small percentage of bold yet risky instructors represent the innovators. They put their reputations and often their jobs on the line for a new instructional approach or tool. The rest of the education populace seems to fall into the late majority and laggard categories, with the bulk of them being laggards. Educators are often skeptical of new teaching tools and approaches, primarily because they do not believe that many innovations actually improve the learning experience, much less equal that of previous techniques. However, it has been theorized and proved that distance learning is a viable alternative to standard classroom-based instruction. Specifically, Second Life, a form of distance learning in an Internet-based virtual reality, can be an excellent supplementary tool in a second or foreign language class.

## DISTANCE LEARNING

As new technologies become accepted in education, instructors are encouraged to adapt and incorporate them into their pedagogy. Many innovations are intended for the enhancement of the classroom experience itself. Some of these frequently adopted tools are overhead projectors with transparencies, streaming audio and video from the World Wide Web, and PowerPoint presentations with LCD projectors. These tools make the learning experience much more interesting for students and teachers alike. However, there are few widely accepted innovations surrounding Distance Learning. One reason for this is because of the often prohibitive cost of high-speed networking and equipment on both the sending and

receiving end of the exchange. But what exactly is distance learning?

Kathleen Davey (1999), founding Dean for Instructional Technology at Florida Gulf Coast University, defines distance learning as "any formal educational process that occurs with the teacher and the student separated by either time or distance" (p. 44). Given that definition, distance learning is not a new phenomenon. Students who are given homework or take-home essays are clearly obtaining their knowledge through a means of distance learning. The evolution of the practice has included heavy use of the Internet and the World Wide Web for course delivery, communication, and document exchange.

However, many in academia have become familiar with the interpretation of distance learning provided by Dr. Jan Wilson (2002) of Jacksonville State University. She states that "distance learning is an educational approach that integrates technology, connectivity, curricular content, and human resources" in order to teach students out of the traditional classroom (p. 638). In that respect, distance learning is relatively new. That, then, would explain some of the reluctance of those in education to implement distance learning in their curricula.

Dr. Charles Notar (2002) of Jacksonville State University, along with his colleagues, say that the use of technology in the classroom has been met with so much resistance and reluctance "due to the unfamiliarity" many teachers have with those new methods (p. 649). They state that teachers would rather rely on their "traditional methods of teaching and interacting with students" (Notar et al., 2002, p. 649). Indeed, teachers' skepticism of distance learning is not without reason. Many in academia believe that new innovations, especially those that are of the technological variety, do not equal the educational experience of the classroom. According to Dr. Gilbert Furstenberg (1997), a senior lecturer in French at MIT, teachers simply do not want to take the time to learn about new innovations because they fail to see their roles

in the classroom. And only when teachers see it "as a tool that can assist them and their students in their loftier endeavors" will technology reach its full potential (Furstenberg, 1997, p. 72). Additionally, because instructors shape their teaching approaches based on their own experiences of what has and has not worked in the past, they remain apprehensive when they are bombarded with new tools and methods for teaching their courses that conflict (or do not necessarily coincide) with that to which they are accustomed. Often, those who are most reluctant to experiment or incorporate new media and technologies in the classroom are even less familiar with the learning styles of the Net Generation learner.

However, it is the belief of Richard Cage (1995) that the teachers' interpretations of what does and does not work needs to change. He says that perhaps "the problem is the curriculum and methodology in place in the classroom" (Cage, 1995, p. 52). Cage goes on to state that different students have different learning styles, and in this age of constant technological stimulation, "students need to be more actively and directly involved in the learning process" (Cage, 1995, p. 52). Otherwise, the learning styles of those students who are more kinesthetic (learn better when they are "physically involved in what they are studying") will be ignored (Cage, p. 52). Elaine Pawling (1999), an instructor at Sheffield University and later High Storrs School, concurs with this sentiment. She says that "teachers are usually forced to target the middle ability band of a class as the bench mark" (Pawling, 1999, p. 165). This means that weaker and stronger students "are required to complete tasks that are not appropriate for their ability, which leads to frustration or boredom" (Pawling, 1999, p. 166). This, according to many in academia, is where distance learning can equal and in some cases improve upon the traditional classroom experience.

Notar, et al. (2002) feel that "distance learning can provide wonderful opportunities for teachers to enhance active learning" in their students (p.

649). Wilson (2002), Notar's colleague, also believes that "when distance learning is implemented correctly, it has the ability to build on the unique, dynamic characteristics of digital content to create productive, creative, and interesting learning environments" (p. 638). A way to implement distance learning correctly is by utilizing all the appropriate technological resources. Davey (1999) states that "internet resources, such as email, blogs, listservs, and chat rooms, combined with video and {digital} materials leaves fewer and fewer instructional objectives that cannot be accomplished through distance learning" (p. 46).

However, it is not just the opinion of these innovative educators that drives distance learning. Many in academia base their endorsements for distance learning on documented course observations and case studies that indicate its usefulness, as opposed to traditional methods. For instance, a study done in 2000 by the National Education Association reported that "faculty rated their distance learning courses higher and as far more compliant with quality standards determined by the NEA when interactive technology is used" (Notar et al., 2002, p. 652). Catherine McLoughlin and Ron Oliver (1998), lecturers in educational technology at Edith Cowan University, documented one course observation that indicated "there are positive effects on motivation, learning, and problem-solving behaviors as a result of collaborative work around computers" (p. 127).

McLoughlin and Oliver (1998) documented several other case studies that show the advantages computers add to a language course. Based on their findings, they concluded that "group work around computers offers opportunities for language use and enhanced learning outcomes" (McLoughlin & Oliver, 1998, p. 131). More specifically, their research proved that group work with computers provides support for "relatively autonomous learning on the part of the students, increased collaboration and negotiation, a higher quality of 'exploratory talk' and cognitive discourse, greater problem solving competencies and higher order

thinking, and development of writing skills and literary uses of language" (McLoughlin & Oliver, 1998, p. 131).

## SOCIAL LEARNING

Well-designed social learning environments foster increased opportunities for collaborative activities. Socialization among humans uses many clues to provide the intended message. With the latest developments in 3D virtual environments, which are now available to anyone with a relatively recent model computer and high-speed connection to the Internet, technology is reaching new levels of immersive experiences, incorporating rich visual elements and animations that provide a full-featured social learning environment. When enhancements to virtual environments are made that mimic real life, users become more enmeshed with the content and less focused on user interface issues that sometimes plague advanced virtual environments. How, then, do educators modify current curricula to fit into these advanced visual environments?

Many faculty members face a common and often perplexing question: How do we engage online students? Jones (1998) has suggested that learners are not intrinsically motivated unless the learning environment offers motivational features. He further stipulates that learners need to have a reason for entering the computer-based environment but then also need to find it stimulating enough to engage in the environment. In order for knowledge and skills to come together in interactive learning, students need practice and experience (Jones, 1998). Students also need opportunities to feel safe to learn in an environment that provides them with experiences that allow them to apply existing knowledge and succeed in successive steps. Games and simulations can provide such a "world" for students (Gredler, 2001). Simulations have been used to enhance adult learning in corporate and military

settings for over a half-century, but the use of games in traditional educational settings has only recently received attention (Thompson & Rodriguez, 2004). Recognizing the motivational and instructional power of games and simulations moves educators into a new realm for delivery of learning outcomes (Jenkins, 2005).

Jenkins (2005) recently proposed several aspects of games that make them a viable approach to promote student academic learning. He suggests that games:

- Lower threat of failure
- Foster engagement through immersion
- Manage levels of attainment to prevent feeling overwhelmed
- Link learning to goals and roles
- Create a social context with shared interests
- Present multimodal learning environments
- Support a framework of inquiry

The use of games and simulation capitalizes on the motivational factors necessary to engage the learner. Embedding learning activities into games and simulations in an online environment will offer students socially acceptable and personally gratifying opportunities to learn (Thompson & Rodriguez, 2004).

## THE CASE FOR SECOND LIFE

Imagine a learning environment where you can go anywhere, do anything, and interact with others in ways never before possible on networked desktop or laptop computers. Learners can visit such places as gothic cathedrals, cities, museums, libraries, and places too dangerous or impossible to go in real life; and more importantly, they can interact with one another. This three-dimensional world exists, created by its residents who are physically located around the world. Second Life has the

potential to revolutionize distance learning in ways limited only by our imaginations.

Second Life is an immense environment consisting of more than 5 million residents from around the world, representing almost every walk of life, including a small cadre of educators that recognize how an interactive 3D environment can affect the educational experience in a positive way. Most educators have never experienced an interactive 3D environment (Massive Multi-User Online Role Playing Game [MMORPG]) where real learning can take place, which is one reason there can be so much resistance to the use of them in the classroom. Many teachers and parents frown on the use of videogames at school. Although there is a number of very well done interactive educational titles, they are rarely used for an extended period of time, and often they are "static" titles that, when played once, lose their luster. However, when considering the positive attributes of MMORPGs, we find that:

*Gamers come to virtual worlds because in them they find more than a game, they find other gamers. They come to compete with each other, to collaborate with each other, to learn from each other, to profit from each other, to talk to each other in the game, at the coffee machine at work or in chat rooms on the Internet. Players come to MMOs to interact with other players, and in that way, MMOs are a very special form of interactive entertainment, in that they derive their value mainly from the fact that there are other players there* (Ludlow & Wallace, 2006).

Furthermore, resistance by some academics to these environments may be because the traditional role of "master," or "sage" is no longer the standard; in fact, it is sometimes just the opposite. In a world where anything is possible, mistakes can be made and corrected; and where information is easily accessible by everyone, the role of educators must incorporate that with which many of our students are already familiar.

MMORPGs are becoming ever more popular among adolescents and adults due to their social context, while at the same time offering an array of complex activities and objectives that players must accomplish in order to "succeed" in the game. There are several recent studies that examine the teaching and learning potential of this particular genre of video games, most specifically to teach science and physics (University of Central Florida NSF grant, award number 0537078). These efforts are important because they suggest there can be sound pedagogical methodology incorporated into MMORPGs, and more researchers are exploring the potential of these environments.

With an increase in high-quality graphic computing and fast networking capability becoming more commonplace in homes, the "prescripted," often rendered versions of the most popular games (note the advanced graphics in games such as Medal of Honor, Grand Theft Auto, and Madden Football) have given rise to an even more interactive, completely unpredictable environment called a micro-world.

The term "micro-world" was coined by Lloyd P. Rieber and is defined as "a small but complete subset of reality in which one can go to learn about a specific domain through personal discovery and exploration" (Rieber, 1992). Furthermore, micro-worlds allow users to interact with others and build objects within the environment, thus adding to the interactive nature of the world. Through the creation of a number of environments where Rieber's son could determine his own direction and make decisions regarding his learning that changed based on the decisions he made, Rieber suggests that visually based virtual environments are an extension of constructivist learning theories (Rieber 1992).

Currently, one of the most advanced of these micro-worlds, developed by Linden Lab, is called Second Life. As stated on secondlife.com, "Second Life is a 3-D virtual world built and owned by its residents." It is a multi-user, visually enhanced, interactive environment currently inhabited by

more than 5 million residents from around the world. Second Life is not a game but rather a virtual environment built entirely by its "residents" (players who are also referred to as avatars). The Second Life "platform" is currently being used by more than 300 educational institutions (Spring, 2007) as a way to engage students in immersive educational experiences.

Much like in the real world, residents of Second Life can buy their own land, build their own houses, rent previously built apartments, purchase items, or do various other activities. In that sense, the environment within Second Life is an imitation of reality. Residents can build and construct almost anything their skills allow and interact with objects and residents from all over the world within the environment. Second Life comes with built-in tools for building and scripting (built-in compiler); and animation, sound, video, and textures can be developed outside and easily brought into the environment.

However, because Second Life is a computer program, there are also certain rules that can be manipulated or broken. The residents can fly without transportation, walk around underwater without needing to breathe, or teleport between locations in a split second, much like Star Trek. However, these are not the only things that can be manipulated in Second Life. Audio or video clips can be uploaded into Second Life and attached to certain objects. Also, PowerPoint presentations can be given with or without the presence of an instructor. For those instructors who prefer that their students see them, a video of the instructor describing the information on PowerPoint can be prerecorded, uploaded onto a flat screen, and viewed by the students. Note cards that contain any information that a teacher desires can be attached to any object in Second Life and retrieved with a click of the mouse. Additionally, words or phrases can be attached to objects as floating script, so the students would not even need to click on an object to get a written version of its corresponding word. Regarding communication, it can take

place in two ways: the more traditional textual chat or the use of the more recent incorporation of voice communication (Summer, 2007).

## SECOND LIFE IN PRACTICE: COMPOSITION

The effective use of Second Life is not an easy task; however, it is one that is not that much more difficult than the first steps many educators made many years ago when experimenting with Power-Point, the World Wide Web, or Learning Management Systems. Modifying curricula is equally as important as modifying one's mindset. In 2005, Dr. Bryan Carter from the University of Central Missouri introduced Second Life into one of his composition courses. The objectives of that course included sharpening skills learned in first year composition and encouraging students to write "experientially"; that is, experiencing through Second Life what their paper topics concerned instead of writing from a detached, third-person perspective. For example, if a student chose to write about subcultures within virtual environments, he or she would perhaps join one and write about that experience in addition to researching what exactly a subculture is and how one develops and exists within a virtual environment. Following are two examples of writing assignments from which students could choose:

### Appearance, acceptance, identity, and race

http://terranova.blogs.com/terra_nova/2005/03/the_boundaries_.html
http://secondlife.blogs.com/nwn/2004/01/king_for_a_day.html
http://www.dragonscoveherald.com/blog/index.php?p=1009#more-1009
http://www.nickyee.com/daedalus/gateway_identity.html
http://www.humanities.uci.edu/mposter/syllabi/readings/nakamura.html

http://www.nickyee.com/daedalus/ar-chives/000894.php

http://secondlife.com/notes/2003_10_20_archive.php#20031024

http://secondlife.com/notes/2003_10_27_archive.php#20031027

**Short Paper Assignment.** Appearance, acceptance, identity, and race are all important concepts in real life because they all shape in part who we are and how others perceive us. Second Life is not all that much different with regard to how others see our avatars and accept us for what we look like first and later identify us based on not only our outward appearance but also whether or not we connect ourselves with an obvious racial or social designator. Why would appearance be so important within a virtual environment, and given that we can change our appearance, why would others tend to accept us based on our outward appearance? (Or do you even believe this is true?) Is there such a thing as race in cyberspace? How is the concept of "race" defined within a multi-user environment, and do you find it to be in any way similar to the way it is defined in the real world? After spending some time in Second Life, how is your identity transmitted through your avatar? And why have you constructed your avatar to look the way he or she does? Is the appearance of your avatar important to your being accepted by any groups with whom you interact "in-world"?

   **Assignment.** Read the articles above and modify your avatar to fit one or more communities or groups that you find interesting. Interact with the group for a period of time and record how that interaction changes based on changes you make in your outward appearance. Is a costume necessary to be accepted in the group? Define your Topic and construct a well-thought-out thesis statement to post on our blog by the deadline date. After spending a few days with one or more groups and reading several of the articles above, record your findings in this Short Paper Assignment. Ensure that you inform us how you went about

your experience, detailing how you originally looked (perhaps providing a snapshot) and how and why you made whatever changes you made in order to "fit in" to the group(s) you decided to join (also providing a snapshot). Be detailed in your response and ensure that you reference places, coordinates, and any SL members that you obtain permission to mention.

**Virtual Communities**

http://secondlife.blogs.com/nwn/2005/11/subdivi-sions.html

http://scoop.epluribusmedia.org/sto-ry/2006/8/3/144841/0527

http://secondlife.blogs.com/nwn/2004/05/the_school_of_s.html

http://www.insead.fr/CALT/Encyclopedia/Com-puterSciences/Groupware/VirtualCommuni-ties/

http://www.wired.com/gaming/gamingreviews/news/2005/04/67142

**Short Paper Assignment.** Several communities within Second Life pride themselves on being democratic, open, accepting, and welcoming to newcomers or anyone looking for a place to be themselves. For instance, "The Neualtenburg Projekt is a nonprofit cooperative and self-governed community, whose purpose is to: enable group ownership of high-quality public, private, and open-space land; create a themed yet expressive community of public and private builds; and implement novel democratic forms of self government within Second Life." Do you consider these types of virtual communities important within a virtual environment, or are they redundant because it's all "virtual"? Why do you believe there are so many of these communities within the SL environment? What are some of the negative aspects of becoming a member of one or more of these communities? Are there any positives to becoming a member of a virtual community?

   **Assignment.** Look for one or more virtual communities that interest you and join. Try to

become an active, contributing member of the community, which may entail making some changes in the way you look or behave. On our course blog, define your topic and construct a clear and focused thesis statement by the deadline date. In your Short Paper, discuss your experience within your new community and why you chose the one you did. Also, discuss any changes you found necessary in order to be more fully accepted within your community and how you felt about those changes. Please be complete in your thoughts to include the community, the coordinates, governance, philosophy, number of members, snapshots, and so forth.

Feedback from these assignments and the class in general over the past two years has been overly positive. Course evaluations from the past two semesters suggest that more than 85% of the students enjoyed the experience and thought that Second Life was a good tool for composition. The other 15% of students were unsure of how useful this technology was to their overall learning experience. Partly because of this positive feedback and outlines of future activities and projects making use of Second Life, a recent grant has been provided by the College of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities to expand the use of Second Life to literature classes. Additionally, the University of Central Missouri has recently purchased an island in Second Life called Selmo Park.

## SECOND LIFE IN PRACTICE: FOREIGN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

Using Second Life in a language class is equally engaging. Instead of going on a field trip to a convenience store with a group of English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, teachers can use Second Life to take students on a virtual field trip. In reality, at a convenience store, there is nothing but the objects in the store and a clerk to assist the customers. In a virtual convenience store in Second Life, teachers can attach floating text to more problematic objects so the students can make the connection between those objects and their corresponding words as well as how they are used in sentences. Students can hear an audio clip of a native speaker using the word or a sentence containing the word of any object. Students can also see, keep, and manipulate note cards attached to objects that contain the plural form of the word, alternative words for that object, or a variety of exercises designed by the instructor to demonstrate how the word can be altered. If there is anything of which the students want to make a note for themselves, they can write it on the note cards and keep them in their inventory for later study.

The ability to manipulate the environment in Second Life leaves open the opportunity for instructors to implement a variety of language lessons, from controlled practice to free communication. The level of guidance that instructors want to provide in Second Life is completely up to them. That is how Second Life can be more useful than other distance learning tools such as CD-ROMs, videoconferencing or learning management systems.

On the surface, Second Life appears to be a tool that would be helpful in any second or foreign language classroom. But, as is often an occurrence in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), new techniques arise but are hastily discarded because of their ineffectiveness. Graduate student Dayton Elseth took it upon himself to try Second Life on a group of freshman-level German students at the University of Central Missouri. These students had either never taken German before or their handling of the language was not advanced enough for them to test out of the beginning course. Because Elseth was not their instructor, volunteers were requested from students who wanted to try the program. Unfortunately, only three students stepped forward.

Elseth was aware that such a small number of subjects could not truly measure the overall effect

of Second Life because the students' progression could be a result of practice in Second Life or instruction in their German classes. Therefore, a pretest or posttest was not done. The activities that were done were incredibly informal. No assignments were given on which grades or formal reports could be given to their instructor. More simply, one specific focus of study for each individual meeting was planned, and students were encouraged to stay on task. Most of the focus, since their level of proficiency and accuracy was quite low, was on learning the vocabulary for objects in an apartment.

Within Second Life, Elseth created an apartment in which were placed objects that one would usually find there, such as living room furniture, bedroom furniture, and kitchen appliances. He attached floating text of the German words to each specific object and uploaded audio clips of that specific word being spoken. Note cards were also attached to each object that demonstrated textually the use of the vocabulary word in a sentence or sentences. Most of what was discussed revolved around the vocabulary in the apartment. But students also went over some words and phrases that would be contextually appropriate, given different situations. For example, on a field trip to a virtual furniture store, the students learned the words *cost* and *money*, and the phrase *how much does __ cost?*

The group took field trips often, usually to places of Elseth's choosing since the students had not become familiar with very many interesting places to visit in Second Life. Most of the time, when the group left the apartment, they would teleport to a German-built and German-operated island called Die Insel. There, the students conversed naturally with any users present, always in German. Most of the users at Die Insel spoke English as well as German, so if the students were ever confused about a word or construction, the users were happy to oblige them by translating.

It should be noted that because of conflicting schedules, the students and Elseth were not able to meet at a regularly scheduled time. In fact, on many occasions, only one or two of the three would log in to Second Life because of homework or other responsibilities However, they were able to meet enough times in order to practice the vocabulary and the other forms.

At the end of the study, the students were asked to gauge their own progress in Second Life. We were interested in what the students thought was a benefit of Second Life toward their language studies and if they could pinpoint anything specific from "in-world" meetings in Second Life that they found helpful for German. We were also curious about the ease or difficulty associated with the technical aspects of this environment.

Student #1 and Student #2 felt that it was quite easy to get acquainted with using Second Life, and Student #3 believed that Second Life was easy on a small scale. Student #3 elaborated on that statement by saying that the environment he experienced made it easy for learning German, but he would have liked to familiarize himself with every aspect of Second Life and not just language learning.

In terms of the difficulties the students experienced in Second Life, all three had different responses. Student #1 encountered problems because of technical difficulties on his home computer. Student #2 found it difficult to multitask between walking, chatting, and interacting with objects. Student #3 reiterated his difficulty in figuring out the more complicated functions in Second Life. Additionally, all three students had experience with computers in the past, so it was not difficult for them to use the program, but two of the three students felt that those who are not computer-savvy would be able to adequately use the program. The student who did not concur with the other two did believe that someone without computer experience could eventually get used to Second Life, but it would take some time.

In terms of their German studies, the students submitted different yet positive responses to Second Life. Student #1 liked the feature of learning

vocabulary words and being able to use them in a natural conversation. Student #2 liked the fact that Second Life is a very nontraditional way of approaching education. He felt that students can only learn so much from textbooks and audiotapes. He also liked the nonrehearsed interaction between individuals in Second Life. Contrary to the other students, Student #3 found the planned tutorials to be the most helpful. He liked having specific controlled or guided lessons in Second Life that dealt with a particular aspect of German with feedback from me.

When asked if there was anything about Second Life that would be a detriment to their learning of a foreign language, two of the three students could not see anything negative about the program. Student #2, however, stated that the instability of Second Life was a bit frustrating. On occasion, Second Life would freeze up, or he would get kicked out of the program. This happens in Second Life from time to time, but it is not a result of different programs being run at the same time. It is merely an issue with Second Life itself. However, Second Life updates every week, and I believe they will solve the problem of freezing up in the near future.

When asked if they would like to use a program such as Second Life in their German classes, all three students said they would. Student #2 commented that it might be difficult to implement because specific class time would need to be set aside for it. But he concluded that if an instructor could find class time for Second Life, it would be a helpful tool.

Student #3, who also had a favorable opinion of Second Life, provided suggestions as well. He wished that more assignments were uploaded into the apartment beforehand so he and the other students could log in when they wanted and study. This is actually a possibility within Second Life. Assignments can be uploaded and saved in certain locations for as long as instructors want.

Interestingly, teaching languages in Second Life is not as uncommon as one might initially believe. There are several well-established communities in which language instruction is the primary goal of the environment. Avatar Languages is currently one of the organizations teaching English as a foreign language through its English school in Second Life. A teacher in South America who also plans to eventually teach South America's Aymara and Quechua in the future began the school.

On June 26, 2007, there was a virtual conference, SLanguages, on learning foreign languages in Second Life. According to the ICT for Language Teachers Blog, "The venue was the Glass Pyramid on Second Life's EduNation Island and there were around 50 participants from all over the world. The conference made use of audioconferencing facilities, using the Ventrilo audioconferencing software, so [participants] could hear the speakers and talk to them" (Davies, 2007). Another example of language teaching in Second Life is demonstrated by Howard Vickers (2007), who is currently based in La Paz, Bolivia, where he teaches English. Vickers explains how Second Life adds another method to teaching languages that can be added to what we already do. Further, Vickers cites that "Second Life offers new approaches to language learning" that include constructivist and interactive components that are not as easily done in more traditional classrooms (Vickers, 2007).

The English Village is an innovative island where English as a Second Language is practiced, as well as a host of other language classes. According to a post on the Edumuve.com site, "Teaching English as a second language instructors at the English Village employ what they call "holoteaching," using classrooms where you can completely change scenes with the touch of a button, like the holodeck in the TV show *Star Trek: The Next Generation*" (Hiles, 2007).

To complement these teaching efforts, there is a host of culturally focused environments in which, for the most part, the language of the culture represented within the environment is spoken. They are just like having a virtual world at your fingertips where we can expose our students to native speakers and experiences never before possible with other technologies. These include but are not limited to the following (the names and grid coordinates in Second Life are included to make it easier for those who would like to visit the locations):

**Chinese:** China (113, 180, 33)
**Danish:** Wonderful Denmark (109, 133, 22)
**Dutch:** De Molen, (Nederland 59, 73, 21)
**Dutch:** Virtual Holland, (Our Virtual Holland 161, 162, 22)
**French:** Coupette Plazza, (Choupette city145, 109)
**French:** Gaia, Gaia (226, 48, 34)
**French:** New Paris, New Paris (125, 113, 23
**French:** Paris 1900, Paris 1900 (10,170,16)
**French:** Wildstyl3 Club & Mall, area 51 (202, 118, 26)
**German:** Biergarten, Mann (167, 255, 24)
**German:** Herzlich Willkommen, Die Insel (132, 159, 22)
**Italian:** Made in Italy, Songnisan (67, 137, 83)
**Italian:** Parioli Rome Italy, Parioli (105, 214, 40)
**Japanese:** Japanese Business SIM, Metabirds (133, 35, 30)
**Japanese:** Nagaya (Little Kyoto), Juho (89,165,63)
**Japanese:** Togenkyo, Togenkyo (155, 127, 21)
**Portuguese:** Boteco Brasil, Keiss (227, 46, 40)
**Portuguese:** Brazuk, Gomorra (28, 132, 22)
**Portuguese:** Central do Brasil, Mugunghwa (229, 107, 43)
**Spanish:** Cervantes, Cervantes (101, 163, 21)
**Spanish:** Spain, Spain (69, 136, 33)
**Spanish:** secondlifespain.com, Nangrim (185, 245, 75). (Hiles 2007)

## FUTURE TRENDS

Where will these new tools take education in the 21st century and beyond? We hear the phrase "anytime, anywhere learning" as it relates to distance education, yet if you really consider that idea, most distance education models are not set up that way. Another popular term is hyperconnectivity, which suggests being connected at all times to a network whenever and wherever you go using a variety of devices. If distance education were to merge these trends with a methodology that takes advantage of how today's students learn, communicate, and multitask, then we will have changed the very nature of distance education to take advantage of all available technologies. Recent handset releases by Apple and others of small mobile devices suggest this trend is not going away, yet many distance educators have yet to adapt current curricula to be used by these devices. Additionally, imagine a small device that enables the user to project in 3D what is on the screen of that device onto a wall or even totally around the user, in essence bringing the "virtual" into the "real." There are already companies such as Samsung and Toshiba who make LCDs that display in 3D without the use of those funky glasses we all love to be seen wearing. This trend suggests that the next evolutionary step will be holographic displays that will be portable enough to make the ideas already mentioned a reality.

## CONCLUSION

The results of this study as well as many others indicate an interest on the part of students and educators to use distance learning tools such as Second Life in their courses. Even though Second Life was not intended to be an educational tool, a growing number of instructors are using it in their classes. According to the educational wiki Simteach.com, more than 300 schools and educational organizations have set up shop in the

virtual world and are exploring ways it can be used to promote learning. This growing acceptance of Second Life as a means of instruction might not be a secret in the near future. It may, in fact, become a mainstay in education.

But there is genuine concern behind adopting new, innovative teaching approaches. As Michael Swan (1985) states in his article "A Critical Look at the Communicative Approach," "we must try not to expect too much" from new teaching theories and techniques (p. 87). He realizes that there is a genuine trend in second language instruction as well as in other fields to fully adopt new theories and completely ignore the ones that preceded them. He warns educators to be aware of that. Instead of forgetting about previous techniques, he believes that "we shall probably benefit from the next language teaching revolution, especially if we can keep our heads, recognize dogma for what it is, and try out the new techniques without giving up useful older methods simply because they have been 'proved wrong'" (Swan, 1985, p. 87). This is exactly why traditional methods for instruction should not be done away with. But they should be supplemented with more innovative techniques that can reach students when the traditional classroom cannot.

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## KEY TERMS

**Avatar:** A virtual representation of a person within Second Life. That representation can be human, animal, or nonhuman.

**ESL:** English as a second language.

**Island (Second Life Context):** Virtual space where residents of Second Life can either own parcels of virtual property or some sort of establishment on a parcel of land. These islands are in reality computers in a rack housed at various locations in San Francisco.

**Linden Dollars:** The currency used for exchange of goods and services in Second Life.

**Machinima:** Short films made from virtual characters in video games and virtual environments such as Second Life

**Resident:** Real-life people who interact within Second Life and are referred to as "residents" of the environment.

**Second Life:** A 3D virtual environment created by Linden Lab where "residents" create "avatars" to represent themselves and where a majority of the content is user-created.

**Second Life Grid:** The land masses that make up the largest "islands" in Second Life (see video at http://www.mappanovus.com/ for further explanation).

**Wiki:** A collaborative Web site where content can be edited by anyone who has access to it.