Virtual Worlds as a Context Suited for Information Systems Education: Discussion of Pedagogical Experience and Curriculum Design with Reference to Second Life

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ABSTRACT

The context of Information Communication Technology (ICT) is changing dramatically. Today, Web 2.0 applications such as Facebook and MySpace are used ubiquitously in the general population, and Virtual Worlds are becoming increasingly popular in business, for example via simulations in Second Life. However the capacity of Virtual Worlds is underutilised in educational contexts. Educational institutions in general, but especially those offering Information Systems (IS) courses, must keep pace with emerging ICT and social trends or risk becoming irrelevant. Furthermore, there are particular pedagogical advantages in utilising emerging technologies such as Virtual Worlds in IS education. For instance, Second Life offers an intrinsically motivating, safe, and low cost environment in which to learn IS-related skills such as programming, requirements analysis, systems development, project management, and business process modelling. Drawn from the experience of the authors and current innovations in pedagogical research and practice, suggestions are made for curriculum design and implementation of Second Life in IS Education, including: the benefits of blending the real and Virtual Worlds; enhancement of students' intrinsic motivation; industry-relevant skill transfer; and innovative education that transcends traditional pedagogical practices. These points are illustrated with reference to case studies of IS student projects in Second Life from the University of Hamburg and Curtin Business School. Attention is given to current limitations of this emerging technology, regarding hardware, software, and connectivity. Future developments in both the technology and how it is implemented in educational contexts, integrating the real and virtual worlds via emerging technologies, are mentioned.

Keywords: Virtual Worlds, Information Systems (IS) Education, Pedagogical Experience, Curriculum Design, Second Life