

VIRTUAL WORLDS USERS' PERCEPTIONS OF LEARNING - AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF SECOND LIFE -

Susana de Almeida

José Lagarto

Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Portugal

Abstract

This research derives from the awareness of a growing increase in the use of virtual learning environments in several contexts of formal instruction and from the fact that it is important to clarify several issues related to learning in these environments. The arrival of Second Life (SL) in 2003, its fast growth and development as far as users are concerned, its use in formal learning contexts and the fact that universities are being represented in the environment has risen some discussion regarding virtual worlds and learning.

The SL has caught the academic world's attention and, therefore, it has become a part of many projects. There is also little research in the area of learning in virtual worlds (Dickey, 2005b), mainly as far as SL is concerned. Therefore, through interviews, this research intends to understand the environment and to explore and analyze the users' perceptions of SL and of learning in that environment.

The results of the study showed that the users think that SL is a valid environment for learning, once they consider it motivating, innovative and immersive, characteristics that may foster learning. Some constraints are also pointed out, such as the technical requirements, the learning curve and the pedagogical approach that could be taking more advantage of the environment potentialities than it is now. However, and according to the participants of the study, these constraints seem not to hinder learning.

Keywords

Second Life, virtual worlds, learning