

e-LANGUAGE, e-CULTURE, e-LITERATURE WITHIN A VIRTUAL LEARNING CONTEXT

Secondlife.Com

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Abstract: Already having an impact on language instruction, the lack of space offered to the implementation of new technologies and the Web 2.0 within the humanities is particularly absent in the culture and literature teaching fields. This absence has originated the proposal we introduce here. Along our discussion we seek to demonstrate the projection and validity of the execution of these tools and its advantages for our potential consumers, college humanities professionals, whom in general are not very familiar with the usage of ICTs in the classroom. By offering students the opportunity to surface and network with some of the Web 2.0 tools on Second Life.com, a Web-based space, they will face the acquisition of language, culture and literature through a challenging and dynamic approach, which represents a novel and motivating way of learning. Used as an educational tool, Second Life serves as a context where users can meet, communicate and learn from speakers of other languages and cultures in a synchronous way by transforming themselves into cyber-characters, the so called avatars. Thus, residing and actively participating in Second life can be for virtual students, more fruitful than learning through traditional instruction, since cyber-students interact without time or space limits, breaking conventional classroom barriers. As a consequence, the Web 2.0 offers the potential of a wide range of resources for variable kinds of innovative teaching/learning purposes which will contribute to enhance teaching within this discipline.

1 A FEW REASONS TO INCLUDE TICS IN LITERATURE AND CULTURE TEACHING

Several reasons to illustrate the contribution of the implementation of new technologies to the humanities area, more specifically to the literature and culture teaching will be discussed ahead. Worldwide, technology is transforming the world of art. Artists make efforts to employ it as craft for their masterpieces understanding this unusual combination as a vehicle to integrate science and humanities, positioning themselves at the forefront of innovation. Under this premise, we will come up with several questions; may technology also revolt the world of humanities teaching as it is now transforming the world of arts? Can traditional

culture, literature and language teaching be enhanced by using conventionally opposed concepts such as science and arts? How would this revolution take place in traditional scholarly? The answer to these enquiries is positive, if we consider emerging in a virtual world based on the Web 2.0 as an expansion of the traditional teaching/learning methodology.

Language teaching has emerged in Second Life and teachers and educators are taking an innovative approach by combining Second Life with voice messengers such as Skype and other online teaching tools. Among other possibilities, Second Life offers its residents both an internal voice and written chat as a way of communication. The synchronous nature of chat or Skype provides users with “spontaneous responses promoting active culture learning” as Mike Levy states (2007). For instance, through

chatting on line the technique known as role-play, which makes students imagine an agreed situation and act it out, extends far beyond traditional limits and takes on dimensions simulating reality and fantasy in this virtual world, "when the deepest identity change is possible with a single mouse click, the opportunities to play are endless" (Au, 2008, p. 79). In other words, a role is played starting with the learners' design of his/her avatar's tailored outer shell to act and react to multiple forms of situational contexts with other cyber-characters.

By means of written or spoken chat or even E-mail, Cyber-students or avatars can interact at any time, anywhere and with anyone they come across, so conventional classroom scheduled obstacles like limited time, restricted space, monolingual together with monoculture constraints and authentic identity fade into the setting. For these reasons, a cyber-world hosts the potential of opening up a wide range of development for variable kinds of e-learning exercises in a faster and wide-ranging manner.

2 SECOND LIFE AND WEB 2.0: A CHALLENGE TO IMPLEMENT ICTS WITHIN THE HUMANITIES

Worldwide, ICTs are starting to be seen as a powerful tool for language training. However, the perception of new technologies as a positive strategy for the culture and literature teaching has not been deeply considered in higher education yet. In our proposal, we aim to reveal the projection and validity of the implementation of this tool and its various resources for our potential consumers, college humanities professionals, whom in general are not very familiar with the use of ICTs in the classroom. By registering in this course, students will face the acquisition of language, culture and literature through this challenging method which will embody a ground-breaking approach for specific learning purposes.

Our proposal is consequently centered on the analysis of user-learner capacity to engage and interact in the acquisition of foreign languages, culture and literature. We believe total immersion in the learning scenario of virtual worlds and Web 2.0 tools offer exposure to elements of interaction, providing the means to create motivating environments (Figure 1) for students to learn. (Strevens, 2008).



Figure 1: Motivating environments for students.

Inspired by Neal Stephenson's novel *Snow Crash*, Second Life is a virtual world created in 2003 by Linden Lab. In this parallel cyber-world people can communicate and culturally interchange by turning themselves into virtual characters, or avatars. In the same way, a novel approach motivated computer engineers to create this analogous world, now we intend to inspire people within the humanities to approach literature, culture and language from a more lively and pleasant perspective. This constructivist point of view consists on exploiting emerging technological concepts, strategies and tools (wikis, blogs, videos, video blogs, podcasts, networking, directories, tags, etc.) related to the Web 2.0 through Second Life.

2.1 Some Advantages of using Web 2.0 Tools for Culture and Literature Teaching as Target

The complete role-play practice is based on several factors most of which are learner rather than teacher oriented (Edwards et al, 2008). In this sense, a great amount of attention is placed on the learner and the teacher acts merely as a guide:

- A) there is certain personal investment and identification on the part of the learner involved in creating an avatar and in carrying out his/her actions. The avatar can ideally become an alter ego of the student and experience the advantage of learning in a 3D scenario.
- B) role-play and social interaction are not limited to actual lesson time, but rather, can be lengthened over time (Figure 2). In this sense, Second Life is a creative and enjoyable environment which opens up the traditional classroom walls dynamically. This interaction

can be positively enhanced through the use of forums, wikis, blogs and other tools related to Web 2.0.



Figure 2: avatar performance and role-playing.

- C) avatar performance is directed by the learner who encounters and creates interaction in simulated settings. Statism of regular classroom where students only interact with classmates becomes more dynamic since users are now offered real distant contact to increase their language practice and enrich their specific cultural and literary knowledge.
- D) avatar actions become gradually multifaceted as she/he accumulates a past, lives out its present, and makes future plans.
- E) both the avatars' physical and psychological features can vary, be true to life, or materialize into "want to be" aspirations. In other words, something like if our humanity students could step outside their body and experience life from a remote point of view.
- F) Edwards et al (2008) argue that the identity of the real life learner is fundamentally wrapped in a protective simmer behind the concealing shield of his/her avatar, which may be a particularly eye-catching characteristic to motivate students to take learning risks. A similar shield found in writing or reading can be overcome by providing more freedom and interest in learning, when transforming into a virtual identity.

3 A COURSE PROPOSAL FOR LANGUAGE, CULTURE AND LITERATURE e-LEARNING

3.1 General Objectives

In general terms, the usage of these new tools (blogs, wikis, podcasts, videos), supposes promising possibilities in several humanities areas for new generation of students in a coming future. Major differences can be noted between traditional methodologies and the resources of the World Wide Web, for example, computers and its capabilities for searching information immediately allows Internet to be conceived as a global virtual encyclopedia. The net offers something radically different to traditional sources of knowledge, given that it facilitates students to quickly deepen into contents in opposition to conventional slow searching in library catalogs and indexes. Using Internet and Second Life from a methodological approach is challenging since it will open up the classroom walls and boundaries engaging students with new experiences such as immediate and active language and cultural interaction, literature discussion etc.

Keeping in mind the aim of the study, the feasibility of using the potential of the Web 2.0 for literature, culture and second language learning will be developed under the general hypotheses of how much motivation, engagement and learning could lay beyond the walls of the traditional classroom space (Figure 3).



Figure 3: learning literature within a fast and inspiring context.

Using the topic of travel literature as a pretext for teaching our proposal is built as follows:

- Introducing collaborative language / literature teaching and learning (Web 2.0);
- Developing a new medium of foreign language and culture transmission; and understanding of ICTs and its application
- Introducing the topics of emigration and identity in literature within the general topic of Travel Literature.

3.2 Specific Objectives

- Giving educators the opportunity to research on the roles of management platforms and virtual environments in literature, culture and foreign language learning and teaching.
- Offering educators the opportunity to plan strategies in order to apply the methodology learned along this course with their future potential students, especially younger learners of foreign languages because they already see the Internet as a natural place to learn and play (Gibson, Aldrich, and Prensky 2007).
- Introducing migration and identity through the presentation of different virtual worlds and environments within the context of travel literature.
- Promoting interactive and collaborative tasks as a means of acquiring linguistic and cultural knowledge and developing communicative competence.

4 COURSE PROPOSAL: INTEGRATING LANGUAGE, CULTURE, LITERATURE AND ICT WITHIN THE HUMANITIES CLASSROOM

Language teaching in virtual worlds is still at an early phase of development, yet it is necessary to generate research proving the advantages of the Web for culture and literature training. Under this emerging need, this project is aimed at being a starting point conceived to be directed to teachers/educators/ researchers of language, literature and culture. The overall course will be divided into ten sessions (forty-five minute each), along which a certain amount of time will be devoted to train users not familiar with certain technological concepts to design and implement a collaborative and interactive course in the Moodle platform which will help them to enhance their knowledge acquisition in creative ways.

After briefly stating the advantages of using Moodle and other Web 2.0 tools, this article will focus on the distribution of content and methodological tools in the following charts (Figure 4).

SESSION	Language / Culture and literature objectives	SL/WEB 2.0 Instructions	Web 2.0 methodology and tools
SESSION 1	Introducing participants into the course and travel literature (migration and identity)	Logging in Second Life virtual world First contact with Web 2.0 tools (wikis, blogs, video, chat, Skype)	Web 2.0 (reading online, blog posting, forum, tagging, videoconferencing etc.) as a global communicative language Collaborative learning Real distant interaction Social constructivism
SESSION 2 Sub session 2a	Presenting the literary context of travel literature Introducing the books and authors that will serve as samples	Knowing, analysing the capabilities of Web 2.0 and the Moodle platform SL instruction and potentials	Collaborative learning; constructivism; interaction. Tools: videoconference; hypermedia; Second Life, Moodle platform.

Figure 4: Table of content and methodological tools.

Sub session 2b	<p>Introducing the topic of emigration to the USA</p> <p>Presenting videos made by students at the end of the previous session</p>	<p>Analysing SL as a teaching and collaborative environment</p> <p>SL instruction and potentials</p>	<p>Collaborative learning Interaction; Tools: Web 2.0 video; blogs, hypermedia; hypertext; Second Life.</p> <p>Communicating and interacting online (forum, wiki, etc.)</p>
SESSION 3 Sub session 3a	<p>Introducing multiculturalism, identity, discrimination, etc. through the presentation of different virtual worlds and environments</p>	<p>Analysing SL as a teaching and collaborative environment</p> <p>Developing knowledge through hypermedia</p>	<p>Collaborative learning; constructivism; interaction; developing knowledge through hypermedia</p> <p>Tools: voice; chat; hypermedia; Second Life</p> <p>Reading online; chat; video; oral debate; slide presentation</p>
Sub session 3b	<p>Analysing multiculturalism, identity, discrimination, etc. through the presentation of different interactive applications</p>	<p>Developing knowledge through hypermedia</p>	<p>Interaction; collaborative learning; constructivism. Tools: video; hypertext; Second Life; social networks, Facebook</p> <p>Communicating and interacting online; sharing files; video presentation</p>
SESSION 4 Sub session 4a	<p>Analysing literature excerpts/stories</p> <p>Exploring the potentialities of SL as a teaching and learning environment</p>	<p>Exploring the potentialities of SL as a teaching environment</p> <p>Second Life potentials: voice tool. Web 2.0: social networks; video sharing; online communication</p> <p>Moodle: quizzes</p>	<p>Introducing and teaching Moodle multiple-choice quizzes (use of quizzes for micro—skills acquisition)</p> <p>Collaborative learning; constructivism; interaction; developing knowledge through hypermedia</p> <p>Tools: voice; hypermedia; Second Life; Moodle</p>
Sub session 4b	<p>Cultural and historical background on emigration to the USA</p>	<p>Methodological exploitation and use of the tool in SL</p> <p>Web 2.0 potentials: webpage; hypermedia</p>	<p>Collaborative writing /critical thinking</p> <p>Interaction; collaborative learning; constructivism</p> <p>Tools: images; hypertext; Second Life; wiki; blog</p> <p>Communicating and interacting online; oral debate; uploading images</p>

Figure 4: Table of content and methodological tools (cont.).

SESSION 5	Analysing literary excerpts dealing with emigration and identity	SL instruction and potentials Web 2.0: use of COVCELL whiteboard; social networks; video sharing; online communication	COVCELL whiteboard Collaborative learning; constructivism; interaction. Tools: voice; hypermedia; Second Life; Moodle Reading; chat; oral debate; forum
SESSION 6	Giving a lecture in SL: Literary excerpts dealing with emigration, identity, discrimination and cultural differences	Second Life potentials: oral presentation Web 2.0: video sharing; online communication Moodle: creation of content	Collaborative learning; constructivism; interaction Tools: voice; video; hypermedia; Second Life; Moodle Reading; chat; oral debate; videoconference; PowerPoint presentation
SESSION 7	Literary excerpts dealing with cultural differences	Exploring SL virtual world SL instruction and potentials	Introducing Webquests; Interacting in the Moodle platform Constructivism
SESSION 8	Discussing multiculturalism and multicultural aspects of language learning	Exploring SL virtual world Teaching/Learning how to make a blog	Blogging Social networking/communication Collaborative learning; constructivism; interaction Tools: voice; hypermedia; Second Life; Moodle; Webquest Reading; chat; oral debate; videoconference; PowerPoint presentation
SESSION 9	Discussing multiculturalism and multicultural aspects of language learning Coming in contact with historical and cultural concepts	Exploring SL virtual world Planning a closing meeting in SL	Collaborative learning; constructivism; interaction Tools: voice; hypermedia; Second Life; Moodle; social networking/communication Reading; chat; oral debate; blog
SESSION 10	Evaluate and reflect on what participants have learned to extend discussions, to conclude projects and to look at what the future holds	Developing an interactive and collaborative course in the Moodle platform; Second Life potentials: oral and content presentation; social interaction; role playing Web 2.0 potentialities and tools	Collaborative learning; constructivism; interaction Tools: voice; hypermedia; Second Life; Moodle; social networking/communication; social networks Reading; chat; oral debate; blog; wiki; Webquest; videoconference

Figure 4: Table of content and methodological tools (cont.).

5 CONCLUSIONS

The intention of our proposal based on performing and developing innovative expansions of the Web 2.0 capabilities through Second Life, is to introduce new teaching approaches, which place a high value on participant's creativity, participation, sharing, and cooperation when learning (Figure 5).



Figure 5: Interaction and collaborative work in SL.

Our project helps users to discover e-language, e-literature and e-culture by adopting collaborative and interactive Web 2.0 tools. Despite the fact that in the traditional classroom, the role of a teacher is of an information deliverer and that of students is a passive receiver, in Second Life both teachers and students can co-tailor a learning atmosphere, being an option to conventional classes when compulsory circumstances are met. Even though in many universities and other higher learning institutions, the development of web-based projects is often the consequence of casual acts of improvement initiated by risk-taking individual researchers, as a variety of adaptable, e-learning formats, programs and sites become available, both teachers and students will become fascinated in making the most of the potentials of www.secondlife.com.

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