

**LEARNING THROUGH SHARING :  
OPEN RESOURCES, OPEN PRACTICES, OPEN COMMUNICATION**

***Second Life for Virtual Communities in Education:  
Sharing Teaching Principles?***

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**Abstract**

Commenting on critical pedagogy, Pennycook writes: “Everything in the classroom, from how we teach, what we teach, how we respond to students, to the materials we use and the way we assess the students, needs to be seen as social and cultural practices, that have a broader implications than just pieces of classroom interaction.” (Pennycook, 2001, p. 139). If this is applied to online teaching in a virtual world such as Second Life, on the one hand it can be taken to an extreme: every move, event, participant and interaction is mediated through the virtual platform and its rendering of participant presence, verbal and non-verbal communication, affordances of media converging onto this complex world; on the other, it can be partly non-applicable because “social and cultural practices” as well as participant identities that can be found in SL are fragmented, changeable and hybrid in a way which is hard to define and categorise.

This paper intends to investigate the way in which expert educators perceive their teaching practice and professional identity in the openness of virtual environments. The analysis focuses on the voice of teaching practitioners about the use of virtual worlds or MUVES (Multi-User Virtual Environments) and, more specifically, on Second Life for higher education in the U.K. and Second Life for language learning.

The main questions addressed are whether it is viable for teaching practices in environments such as SL or MUVES to identify “socio-constructive principles” of education practice (in general and more specifically in second language teaching) and whether there are grounds for critical teaching and “reflective practice” (Edge, 2011; Farrell, 1998).

Within the theoretical frameworks of socio-constructivism and critical multimedia literacy, as implemented in virtual environments, virtual communities are investigated by analysing the “voices” of expert practitioners who use them for teaching purposes. These “voices” and “narratives” will be discussed focusing on how the communities of practice are presented and how the processes of teaching and learning are perceived and shared.

As Goodfellow and Lamy (2009) suggest for cultural studies, we might be at a stage beyond socio-constructivism as theorized by Anglo-Western English-speaking, ICT-intensive cultural paradigms, especially in contexts of “transnational online learning” within “globalized e-learning cultural challenges” (Edmundson, 2007).