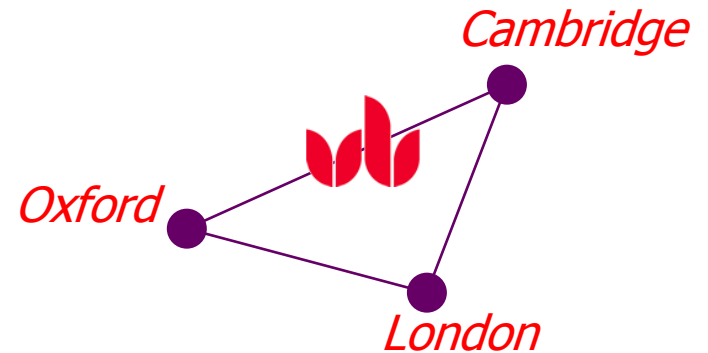


Maintaining Context in a Changing (Virtual) World

Educators' Perspectives for OpenSim and Second Life

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Types of Virtual Worlds

(used in Education)

- (SL) Second Life
- (OS-DP) Dedicated Provider, not Second Life
- (OS-IH) Institutional Hosted
- (OS-SH) Student Hosted (Sim-on-a-Stick)

Question: which one is **best**?

Answer

(to the question: which one is best?)

- That's a stupid question

- Problem:
 - What *exactly* means 'best'?
 - 'Best' in which way?
 - Define 'best'!

Evaluation Framework (for Virtual Worlds)

- Evaluate Virtual Worlds in a systematic way.
- Consider the two pairs of perspectives:
 - **World vs. Individual**
 - **Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic**
- Conrad, Marc (2011); Leaving the Lindens: Teaching in Virtual Worlds of Other Providers; Proceedings of ReLIVE 2011, Milton Keynes. Available at: <http://sl.sanfoh.com/relive11>

These define four dimensions.

	Intrinsic	Extrinsic
Individual	Immersion	Cost
World	Context	Persistence

- While the anecdotal experience at the University of Bedfordshire has been discussed in previous work a more systematic approach was needed to find out what happens elsewhere.

This paper focuses on Context

	Intrinsic	Extrinsic
Individual	Immersion	Cost
World	Context	Persistence

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Find out via Interviews

- Interviews
 - 34 Academics between January-May 2012
 - 20 only SL
 - 2 only OS
 - 12 both
- Educators were asked to express their opinions regarding the contexts of OS and SL.
- Used Strauss and Corbin's grounded theory as a methodology to investigate interviews and identify common themes.

Questions asked:

- 1. What does a typical session of yours look like in SL's/OS's virtual environment?
- 2. Why do you use SL/OS in your teaching? In your opinion what are the advantages of this teaching method?
- 3. Respectively, are there any disadvantages?
- 4. Comparing the university classroom with the virtual classroom, which one may have better results?
- 5. Which one of these two virtual environments do you consider more appropriate for educational use?

Context in Virtual Worlds (1)

- user-friendly, playful, dynamic, and plausible.
- Students interact with the context of the worlds, **participate actively** in the development of the virtual content **with their creations**, and **explore others' creations**.
- Educators who use SL can be benefited from its **global context** and **reduce the time and effort required for building and scripting**, simply by **using the existing in-world infrastructures** or visiting its marketplace.
- OS worlds have **narrow online communities** due to the fact that they are hosted on many independent servers. This implies that the **content** of OS – either OS-IH or OS-DP – is **very limited**, compared to that of SL, sometimes even completely non-existent.

Common Themes

Context in Virtual Worlds (2)

- Nevertheless, OS users can visit other OS worlds using the **hypergrid** architecture in order to explore other places and communicate with others.
- It is also worth mentioning that the educators who use OS emphasised that they have **absolute control** of their world and a **high degree of independence**, especially in the case of OS-IHs.
- On the other hand, educators using SL **depend directly on Linden Lab**: they should seek support from Linden Lab when they encounter issues related to their region and, on top of that, several educators underlined the **lack of support by Linden Lab** in a rather disapproving tone.

Common Themes

Context in Virtual Worlds (3)

- Additionally, several participants appeared **dissatisfied with the graphical user interface** of both worlds, because it makes them even less intuitive. Moreover, the **incompatibility of MS Office and Open Office with the SL and OS environment** (documents need to be converted to images) was mentioned in several interviews as a significant concern.
- Due to the technical issues identified in both VWs, **the quality** of the implementation process and the results of the learning activities **are degraded**.

Common Themes

Context in Virtual Worlds (4)

- A significant differentiation between the two VWs is that **SL is frequently used for the conduct of exploratory learning activities**, such as treasure hunt, whereas similar activities are not performed equally often in OS. This can be attributed to the **content of SL** which is **much wider and richer** compared to the OS worlds. Furthermore, **SL is used to cover distance learning needs more often** than OS worlds which are not as accessible as SL.
- Finally, deciding on the **physical classroom** is most purposeful in cases where the educational objectives extend beyond the simple practice of skills and **require students' higher level thinking**. Also, when the educational project to be carried out is very brief and fast-paced the use of the physical classroom is preferable, since **the preparation and implementation of activities within VWs** requires quite a lot of time in order for them to be successful.

Common Themes

Context in Virtual Worlds (5)

- Comparing SL to OS, it seems that the former is more appropriate for the implementation of activities in which the communication of the students with non-student users, or remote student-users and the utilization of the global context of the world are considered as essential requirements. On the other hand, OS worlds are believed to be the best choice for these educators who seek closed, protected, and flexible workspaces.

Conclusions?

- In terms of context, there is still far more of it within SL than elsewhere.
- Certain activities are better in OS – as they are not dependent on context
- Hypergridding may be a possible solution to create context in OpenSim? Or it creates only a much larger area without context...
- Need to consider other dimensions in the decision process, most notably cost often leads to a decision towards OS.