



Virtual Worlds and Second Language Teaching for ERASMUS Students

Ricardo Cruz, Paulo Frias

E-mail: ricardocruz@me.com, paulofriascosta@gmail.com

University of Porto (Portugal)

Abstract

Multi-user virtual environments (MUVES) provide opportunities for students to explore authentic learning environments. Second language acquisition may be a challenging task as it requires the repetition of communicative meaningful interactions with balanced input and output contexts, so that the learner may acquire as much language functions, vocabulary, syntax, and grammar in context as possible.

This article aims to describe and understand communicative and pedagogical processes involved in Second Life® (SL™) in a context of language learning, by proposing in-world lessons of Portuguese as a second language for European students arriving in Portugal under the ERASMUS program. The purpose is to provide examples of situated e-learning driven activities and perceive how an immersive context stimulates learning by involving students in real activities (though in a virtual environment), where real life language context situations are provoked, exploring, this way, the possibilities offered by virtuality. The most effective process to achieve this is by providing a learning objective in different contexts, specially through a task-based approach. Students collaborate with each other and acquire together their knowledge of the second language. This is also referred to as problem-solving learning. This approach is highly effective due to the interactive nature of MUVES, as well as a collaborative approach to the acquisition of new concepts and a high level of engagement.

The activities planned will allow experiencing the advantages of this platform compared to physical life teaching and learning contexts, through the inherent characteristics of this medium. To achieve its goals, the article will describe the advantages of virtual worlds as a learning tool, and then continue to debate issues such as the pedagogical rationale and the applicability of a full second language programme, providing examples of lessons and activities. Other issues will also be debated such as the sociological implications and possibilities associated to the proposed learning setting, and also identity issues associated with the virtual world immersion process, and the learning opportunities that arise. Another digression will be focused on the cultural environment setting, needed to provide context to the activities carried out, and the opportunities that MUVES provide in the setting up of innovative appealing culturally aware language environments.