Open Research Online

Breaking down the barriers

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> Schome is already breaking down many of the barriers that exist between 'teachers' and 'learners' and I believe that we can go further than that.

<div align="right">Schomer C, May 2007</div>

This chapter focuses on the voices of teenaged learners – a perspective that should not be controversial at all, and yet it is. Millions of young people engage in social and play activities within virtual worlds every day. We have, for the first time in history, a large population of learners who are well versed in immersive technologies and who choose to use them. As educators seek to take advantage of the affordances and popularity of virtual spaces, it is interesting to note the relative absence of voices of the learners themselves in reflecting on how these environments could be used and how they would they would like to see these educational spaces developing.

Those who choose to enter and engage with commercial virtual worlds have the 'vote' of the marketplace, a consumer choice in which they can vote with their subscriptions. This choice does not exist for most learners within the current educational system. Decisions about the use of virtual environments, the choice of environment and the use of that environment are all made by educators. Consequently, there is a risk that as educators create and build virtual learning spaces they will do so without drawing on the knowledge, experiences and preferences of the learners.

In the 'physical world' there has been a gradual move towards learner consultation in relation to their learning experiences. This can be seen as developing initially from a rights perspective in which learners, and particularly young people, have a right to be involved in decisions affecting their lives (Morgan, Gibbs, Maxwell, & Britten, 2002). That their voices should be heard is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1990). More recently in the United Kingdom, the importance of gaining young people's perspectives in this context has been formalised in government publications such as 'Every Child Matters' (HM Government, 2005). Even so

> there have been relatively few studies of schooling from the learner's point of view (Rudduck, 2006) and such research has often revealed a gulf between children's view and those of adults (Morgan, et al., 2002). This implies a need that might underpin a recent growth of interest in pupils' voice. Hence models of, and research that develops, learner consultation within educational environments are now emerging, for example, the 'Consulting Pupils about Teaching and Learning Project' (Rudduck, 2006). As McIntyre, Pedder, and Rudduck state 'It cannot

> tenably be claimed that schooling is primarily intended to benefit pupils if pupils' own views about what is beneficial to them are not actively sought and attended to.

<div align="right">(Sheehy & Bucknall, 2006, p102)</div>

Learners' perspectives are of crucial importance in any research programme that seeks to inform the shaping of new educational initiatives, and yet young people's voices are often not given power in research seeking to develop virtual learning spaces. The perspectives of older learners, in post-compulsory education, regarding a range of 'e-learning' experiences are researched increasingly often, for example in the Learner Experiences of e-learning programme that ran from 2005-2009 (JISC, 2009). This programme explored the types of technology that particular users value and the ways in which they integrate different technologies into their lives. One finding that emerged is that often it is the 'changing pedagogical approach which might cause concern to students rather than using different types of technology per se' (JISC, 2009).

Futurelab, an organisation based in the United Kingdom, produced a report that considered at learner voices in relation to developing educational systems and technology. The organisation identified ethical issues such as increased learner engagement, the promotion of personalised learning, and learners as consumers with a right to shape the services they receive (Rudd, Colligan, & Naik, 2006). However, the voice of young people regarding education within 3D virtual worlds is not apparent in educational research literature, although the use of these worlds within education appears to be on the increase (Kirriemuir, 2007, 2008, 2009). A range of methods for promoting the voice of the learner are developing but 'examples of good practice remain relatively rare. In many cases learners are consulted through "formal" and "traditional" methods on issues predetermined by the school and staff' (Rudd, et al., 2006, p4). It appears that the population with the most experience of virtual worlds is not being consulted widely in the move towards virtual educational environments. This is despite an explicit identification within the educational literature of why this would be a worthwhile engagement. The development of virtual social spaces highlights the disparities between reasons for listening to learners, technologies that enable this engagement and the degree of consultation and engagement that is actually carried out.

> How many young people are choosing to interact with new technologies represents a significant change in the way they consume, create, communicate and share information. There is an increased emphasis on 'online spaces' that allow for the development of communities of interest. These often evolve from the ground up and are jointly 'owned' and influenced by the people who use them. These technologies offer great, yet largely untapped potential for embedding learner voice in education.

<div align="right">(Rudd, et al., 2006, p4)</div>

If we support the view that young people, and indeed all learners, have a right to influence the decisions and practices that affect their lives, then the advent of virtual worlds presents an opportunity to seek learners' perspectives and opinions from the beginning. Virtual worlds, as sites for new educational practices, could offer new opportunities for young people to shape and have the power to shape their own educational lives and experiences. Alternatively, real-world power relationships and vested interests could intervene, either to reduce or to transform young people's voices. An example of this would be 'RAM raiding' (Sheehy, Ferguson, & Clough, 2007) by academics / researchers who visit young people's virtual worlds, take data and leave without contributing to that community or giving the voice of the young people a presence in their publications.

This suggests that there are ethical issues about how educational researchers and those who seek to build educational practices within virtual worlds should enact their research. This situation has parallels with research in the physical world, where young people and adults with learning difficulties are typically excluded from research which is about them and which is presented as being conducted for their benefit.

Who are the learners?

The learners whose views form the basis of this chapter are seven teenagers who took part in the Schome Park programme (detailed by Twining in Chapter 8) between February 2007 and May 2008. This was one of the first initiatives that used virtual worlds in an attempt to explore and create new educational practices. It involved an exploration of educational possibilities that primarily took place on the two Schome Park islands in Teen Second Life, and in a related wiki and forum. There was an enormous amount of user engagement in each of these sites. Sensor data showed that well over 3700 hours of user activity took place in world and, by the time the islands closed, the wiki contained over 900 pages and 47,024 posts had been created in the related forums (Schome Community, 2008a).

As described in Chapter 6, the community experimented with a wide variety of ways of teaching, learning and interacting. These were discussed and documented both in world and within the forum and wiki. The most active teenagers in the community invested remarkable amounts of time in it. Ten of them posted over 28,000 of those forum posts and, between them, have spent around 250 days logged into Schome sites. The most active avatar controlled by a teenager is recorded as having spent 215 hours in Second Life, in addition to his 33 days (792 hours) logged in to the forum. This does not include the time he spent editing the wiki, the times he was in world but the sensors recording activity were switched off, and the time he spent off-line working on various projects. For him, and for many learners,

Schome offered an attractive experience. For others, the opposite was the case – they registered but spent little or no time in world, in the forums or in the wiki.

This chapter focuses on those in between those extremes – the seven teenagers who posted between 100 and 500 times in the forum (Table 9.1 presents an overview of their contribution). Seventeen young learners posted more than 500 times, but this high level of engagement suggested their experience would not be perceived as typical. The analysis focuses on forum postings, partly because this forms a complete record, forum postings are not continually open to revision and modification by the community like wiki pages, nor are they partial like the records of in-world chat kept by individuals. In addition, forum postings allow time for reflection; asynchronous dialogue proceeds at a slower pace than synchronous discussion, and many of these forum postings were composed and formatted in a way that suggests they had been considered and polished before they were added to the online boards.

Although this chapter deals with breaking down the barriers between teachers and learners, it only deals with teenagers' posts. This is in order to focus as clearly as possible on the voice of the young learners – allowing their voices to frame and shape the discussion.

Table 9.1: Summary of Schome activity by seven teenagers.

Individual	Number of postings	Time in forum	Time in Schome Park	Dates active	Forum activity
SchomerO	296	2 days 11 hours	19 hours	March 2007 – January 2009	Forum activity took place 7am-11pm.
Schomer P	264	1 day 18 hours	39 hours	July 2007 – February 2008	Forum activity took place 6am-11pm.
SchomerQ	437	3 days 1 hour	30 hours	October 2007 – present	Based in USA. Forum activity took place noon-4am GMT
SchomerR	228	1 day 8 hours	64 hours	March 2007 – Sept 2008	Forum activity took place 10am-11pm
SchomerS	103	21 hours	37 hours	March 2007 – February 2008	Forum activity took place 7am-1pm and 4pm-10pm
SchomerT	117	1 day 5 hours	1 hour	March 2007 – July 2007	Forum activity took place 11am-1pm and 2pm-9pm
SchomerU	421	10 days 10 hours	27 hours	March 2007 – August 2008	Forum activity took place 5am-8am and 10am-2pm

(Note that time in Schome Park is a minimum figure in all cases – sensors were not always operational)

Hearing the learner voice

The forum comments from these seven learners could be fitted into the four ways identified in the Introductory chapter in which virtual worlds interact with education and with real-world concerns. Coding them in this way showed that the teenagers talked about real-world education and about learning skills and content relevant in virtual and real worlds. They had even more to say about new ways of teaching and learning but, unlike the adult writers within this book, made little comment on how their experience could be used to change the education system. The educational counterpoint described in the Introduction, the interplay between virtual and real was not as apparent to them – they were able to scrutinize, develop and appreciate their activity in Schome but saw little opportunity for implementing it in their day-to-day school life.

Likewise, the forum data from these seven students support Twining's description of the features of Schome (Chapter 8). These postings show that their experience of Schome did differ from school in the areas of roles, relationship, curriculum, discipline, motivation, focus, perspective and, implicitly, theoretical stance. However, when coded along these dimensions, or according to the four categories outlined in the Introduction, the teenagers' postings did not fit tidily. They bulged beyond the confines of these classifications. Their data bore these classifications out, but could not be contained within these classifications. An important reason for this was that the postings contained a lot of 'messing about' – a lot of time when the teenagers appeared to be doing nothing but having fun. A return to the overall forum statistics showed that this was clearly case. Of the top ten most popular threads in this forum set up to discuss and develop 'the education system for the information age', eight are games. The most popular thread, the thread containing the most posts, the longest-lasting thread, the thread that never dies is 'What are you listening to? It contains 2030 posts written over two years and does exactly what it says on the tin. The latest post, written by a teenager who had not posted in the forum for two months, reads, 'Fade to Black-Metallica. I know two people who can play the intro to it, if not the solo, which is pretty damn good. ☺'. No overt educational content, no discussion of weighty issues – just a chance to touch base with the community.

What learners use the forum for most consistently is having fun. But that is not all that the medium is used for. When the Schome Park islands were open, teenagers used the forum to organise their community, to develop their environment and their curriculum, to impose order, to discuss their identity, to share expertise, to agree rewards and sanctions. In doing

this, they not only broke down the barriers between learners and teachers, they broke down what it means to be a teacher. In UK schools today, these different roles are the responsibility of teachers, the senior management team and the school governors. Elements of these roles may be delegated to school councils or to prefects, but the expectation is that these elements will be controlled by adults and are inextricable elements of the role of the teacher. The Schome learners showed that this is not inevitably the case and that, given the opportunity; learners can take the lead in all these areas.

Organising the community

> We're trying to make the island as self-sufficient as possible - that means less responsibility on the staff and more on us

SchomerU (April 07)

From the time the Schome Park islands opened in Teen Second Life, many of the teenaged members of the community began to take on roles more typically associated with teachers. All the seven students whose forum contributions are considered here willingly took the lead in some areas without being prompted to do so by adults. This was not universally the case – many who signed up for the project made little or no contribution – but the example of these active members of the community demonstrates the extent to which young people are able and willing to take on these roles. These teenagers did not necessarily have the ability or confidence to teach, or sufficient subject area expertise to make this possible. Their success in taking on areas such as environmental management and regulation of the community suggests that control of these areas could be more widely shared with learners.

Developing the environment

> Looking at the offerings of many other institutions, we've concluded that most don't really use the platform to its advantage, basically just putting up a model of the campus, or a few key buildings, and plastering it with existing print/video marketing materials...

Patrick Lauke, University of Salford, quoted in (Kirriemuir, 2008, p60)

In early 2007, some educators in Second Life were developing exciting and innovative opportunities for learners. However, as the quotation from Lauke suggests, many institutions were making much less use of their opportunities. Given an environment in which others had built weather systems, forests, complete ecosystems and fully functioning communities, the enthusiasm for accurate reproductions of real-life campuses was often misplaced. Universities and colleges that produced these reproductions had the potential to explore the Second Life grid to find examples of good practice. At the same time, they had the opportunity and resources to employ trained builders, architects or programmers to implement their vision.

What they appeared to lack in many cases, was the learners' perspective on what it would mean to live and learn in these virtual settings.

The teenagers in Schome were much more constrained. To begin with, their forum postings contain no suggestion that they had ever had the opportunity to be involved in the design of the school environments in which they worked every day. An additional constraint was that, as access to the Second Life grid is limited to those aged 18 and over, they had no legitimate opportunities to explore other environments within Second Life. They did not have the option of buying and importing items, buildings or services from other islands. Nevertheless, given the chance to develop their environment, each of these seven learners thought deeply about it from a variety of perspectives and built on their experience as learners in order to develop Schome Park. They proved to be very aware of the practicalities, the aesthetics and the ethos of the project, and they thought in a detailed way not only about how the island could be used to support learning but also about how they could make best use of their resources.

After spending two months in Schome Park, SchomerR was able to bring together real-life and in-world experiences to suggest a redesign of the island. Note how many factors she brings together within one forum posting. She situates her plan in the context of the island as a whole, identifies the features she feels are essential to the community, suggests solutions to in-world design problems, links her plan to her own emotional responses and suggests a real-world model for her proposed building.

> I think that there shouldn't necessarily be a big community centre with everything in it because then the rest of the island will be a bit empty. However, the basic freebie store, government and meeting places would be good. To sort out the problem of getting lost maybe we could arrange it as you would a shopping centre, with everything situated around one large corridor (per floor)? You'd have to make the corridor big and the roofs - if we have any (which I think we should because to me, a building doesn't look complete without a roof) - high to prevent claustrophobia and the camera being blocked by objects, but apart from that we could build it so that it takes up little space quite easily.
>
> Also, I would like to have the Plaza back as I was quite attatched to it and I liked the space to just sit and chat with people.
>
> SchomerR

A few days later Sparker5, the staff member responsible for much of the building work on Schome Park, posted a proposal for the redesign of the island. This was not an end to discussion – his proposal fitted into the ongoing debate about the design and ethos of the island. It was clear that, like him, the teenagers were not narrowly focused on building an educational establishment; they were concerned with constructing a community and an environment. In order to do so, they took into account a range of perspectives, and were particularly interested in dealing with problems that had been identified in the past.

This is great, it's difficult to tell how big it is but hopefully we'll be able to fit in some kind of shop in the red spaces. I particularly like the debating circle thing. It's nice that if buildings do go into the red spaces it won't be crowded but also won't be empty like the old megabuilds. Also it won't be maze-like which is something that many SParkers [teenagers] brought up about the old megabuilds. A great improvement!

SchomerO

The teenagers debated the redesign of the island in great detail – it was clearly a subject in which they felt a personal interest, and they expressed their views clearly and thoughtfully. Some were inspired to download new graphics and modelling software, to learn to use this software, and then to upload proposed designs for discussion. These discussions continued throughout the time that the islands were open, as both staff and students worked to develop the environment. Although staff members were involved, the majority of this forum discussion involved the teenagers working on ideas together, and thinking their ideas through in public.

SchomerU suggested that the scripting [programming] department might need a building. His consideration of this issue forms a mini-debate in itself.

Do we need a building on the island?

Why would we need one?

* Provide a recognisable place for people to find/contact us

* A place where people can get scripts in-world, or submit them to us (like an inbox/outbox)

* Provide a place to hand out scripts

* Place to hold meetings

Why wouldn't we need one?

* It takes up much-needed prims

* We can host our scripts on the wiki (but this may be less convenient)

* We need very little space - we could just one of the generic gorernment buildings

* We could hold meetings anywhere (although, we may get interrupted in public places)

Options:

* Have no building, our base of operations would be the forum and wiki (the disadvantage - new people wouldn't know we exist)

* Integrate ourselves into the generic multi-purpose government building

* Have a building

* Have a small, low-prim building, or just an object (the scripting tree?)

I'm sort of arguing both sides of the argument here...any opinions are welcome.

SchomerU

Once again, this debate takes into account the views and needs of others, deals with practical problems (restrictions on the number of prims – or building blocks – on the island were a

constant source of concern) and shows a flexible and imaginative approach. It also clarifies the role of the scripting department – distributing scripts to other members of the community – and demonstrates an awareness of how the department operates, including its need for publicity, meetings and a clear relationship with other departments.

The quality of the debate here ties in with issues raised in other chapters of this book – particularly the evident deployment of knowledge-age skills and the social-constructivist nature of the knowledge co-constructed within these discussions. In the context of learner voice, the point is slightly different. These teenagers are evidently capable of taking an active part in developing their educational environment. They see that environment as a whole, they are concerned with overcoming problems and with improving the situation for everyone, while taking into account practical problems and resourcing issues. These skills are equally relevant in a 'real-world' context, which raises the question of why these discussions and decisions are typically associated with the role of senior teachers. The debate in the Schome forums shows that there are numerous benefits associated with engaging meaningfully in these discussions. Not only do the teenagers propose solutions to problems that are inhibiting the development of community and of learning, they also reflect deeply on what they and those around them are trying to achieve together.

This is not to say that there is no role for teachers here. Staff took an active role in modeling forms of debate and discussion. At the same time, those responsible for much of the design and construction on Schome Park worked hard to introduce new models and new ways of doing things – making clear the rationale behind their design decisions and explaining the elements they were taking into consideration. They also worked on building skills with teenagers who were interested in developing these. Teaching did take place – but the role of teacher was decoupled from the role of environment developer, and this opened up new possibilities, as it did in the field of curriculum development.

Developing the curriculum

Debate about their environment by the teenagers was not confined to the design and ethos of the island. They also engaged with the curriculum, in part because the main adult-led teaching and learning strands (archaeology, physics, ethics and philosophy) finished at the end of phase 1 of the project. This prompted a discussion of whether these subject strands could be resurrected by the teenagers.

> I don't think we would need many 'experts' because hopefully we can start events ourselves about things we are interested in and therefore have some knowledge of. Also we can see what collective knowledge we have about stuff. Like in Ethics&Philosophy really the debates just needed to be controlled a bit to keep the main theme running, which I think some of us could do.
>
> SchomerT

Again, the discussion unpicked the role of the teacher – teasing apart aspects such as subject interest, expert knowledge and discussion guidance. It also shifted the model from the one-to-many pattern that is familiar from classrooms to a many-to-many model. Individually, the teenagers did not necessarily have the knowledge to run subject strands but they recognised that, by pooling their 'collective knowledge', it was possible for them to do so.

These strands of conversation were connected with subject-based learning. This was not limited to subjects introduced by the staff – the teenagers proposed a variety of others. SchomerU, for example, volunteered that 'I would be willing to help teach French - what I can remember of it (it was two years ago!)', adding: 'Also, I've always wanted to learn some Latin...*looks at SchomerJ* [a teenager known for his love of the language]'. A couple of months later, he posted that 'SchomerU wants programming lessons in Python [a programming language] please!' Sometimes such proposals, and subsequent discussion around them, resulted in staff or students setting up learning sessions either in Second Life or through the forum and wiki. As Twining shows (Chapter 8), an important difference between Schome and school is that the curriculum emerges from learner choice rather than being externally imposed by teachers, examining bodies or government legislation.

The learners' perspective also demonstrates that meaningful learning (see Chapter 6) is not confined to prearranged learning sessions or events – it can take place outside the curriculum as it did in the discussion of the Schome environment described above. Learning can take place both inside and outside formal sessions. This is not a new discovery – although it is, perhaps, too often forgotten within schools. A more important point, that comes out clearly from the teenagers' forum posts, and from the considerable amounts of time that they spent in Schome (see Table 9.1), is that they enjoyed their learning and that they perceived it as fun. This was not the 'chocolate-covered broccoli' approach (Habgood, 2007) of the educational game that imperfectly conceals unattractive content and activities – the 'learning can be fun' approach that sets the teeth on edge. This was fun as defined by Koster: 'Fun is about learning in a context where there is no pressure' (Koster, 2005, p98).

SchomerQ provides a clear example of this. Of the teenagers whose forum posts are studied here, he was the last to join Schome, and so did not experience the more formal, subject-based strands of Phase 1. Within days of arriving in Schome Park, he organised the first of several popgun games involving staff and students. Afterwards, a member of staff asked him about what he had learned. SchomerQ responded

> ahhhhhh ok ill try. well i personally had fun and some of the other player did too. it worked out well being that it was my first event ever that i made with some help of course (schomerx and schomera). One thing that i will change next time is making sure that my event does not clash with someone elses (sparker4 sry) and make sure that everyone shows up. i like the idea of the target mabey i could design somthing like that if i can get help. yea next time im wil try to make it

> indoors making the bounderies easier and add some walls and obsticles so it wil be like you said for ppl to snipe.

<div align="right">SchomerQ</div>

Very clearly, the fun came first and the learning came second – but in this case SchomerQ could see that more fun would be possible if he learned from his experience and collaborated with others to make the game better in the future. As a result, he worked with others to make the next popgun game more fun. This involved developing many Second Life skills: designing and making clothes, creating buildings and programming objects. At the same time, it involved more generic knowledge-age skills, including creativity, teamwork and leadership.

> Ok to help on the new advances in the next game we are going to try to make a target that you wear so that if you get it your out. Next if we could try to make a dome or building which we can use as a field to play on and make obsticles inside. next make the popgun more efficent as in faster shot more shots per sec. and a new design for the 2 teams. And others but i cant think of them rite now [emoticons:] Tongue lol
>
> so we gladly take any help for ppl ty

<div align="right">SchomerQ</div>

Designing the popgun game was always reported as fun. SchomerQ went on to work with SchomerD on a variety of 'dangerous' Second Life games, including boulder dodging, sim bouncing and volcano freefall – all of which they videoed, adding a soundtrack that emphasised the excitement of these activities. Together, they designed and enjoyed a series of fun activities. This was not a curriculum – they did not work out a programme of studies that would result in them developing Second Life skills and knowledge-age skills. What they did was demonstrate that setting fun, rather than learning objectives, at the heart of their experience could result in effective development of these skills.

Ordering the community

Even with fun at the centre of much of the learning within Schome Park, using rewards and sanctions to order the community was an important part of the experience. Every game has rules (Huizinga, 1949). Although the teenagers talked little within the forum about their day-to-day experience of school, it was clear that some of them were very sensitive to disruptive behaviour in class, and to the unfair application of discipline. SchomerD reported one such problem and SchomerO responded:

> Same sorta thing happens in my school SchomerD. The kids that are consistently badly behaved are expected to be badly behaved, meaning if a "bad kid/egg" swears at a teacher not much action is taken. But if say, I was to swear at a teacher I would get into a LOAD of trouble. It's simply not fair.

<div align="right">SchomerO</div>

When the teenagers reported experiencing unfairness and disruptive behaviour in school, they were clear that they had little control over what happened and that, in some cases, they were punished for what they felt were reasonable responses to disruption.

In Schome, the teenagers took responsibility for much of the discipline. They discussed and developed the Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) put forward by staff and they made use of this when dealing with problematic behaviour. Where sanctions appeared to be called for, the community joined in the debate, attempts were made to learn both sides of the story, the gravity of the offence was considered, the reasoning behind proposed punishments was made explicit, and offenders were able to argue their case. When SchomerA allowed somebody else to use his avatar, in breach not only of the AUP but also of the terms and conditions of Second Life, he was banned from Schome Park by staff – the appropriate punishment as defined in the AUP. This was not the end of the matter. SchomerA and staff members put their cases in the forums, and the community debated the complexities of the situation. Schomer R's contribution to the extended debate was typical of the thoughtful and extended responses posted by many of the teenagers before it was agreed that SchomerA should be allowed to rejoin the community in Second Life.

> Personally, I don't think that SchomerA should be, well, not exactly 'let off' but should not recieve a full punishment either, as he has made it clear that he did not give his friend permission to use SL at all. Also, I'd like to know what his friend did, if it was just talking then I understand that this goes against the LL [Linden Lab] contract and should be punished, but should not be punished as much as, say, if his friend had gone around shooting everyone with a dragonball, swearing, griefing etc. I think a 3-day ban should be enough, and also, SchomerA, I think you should have serious words with your friend [emoticon:] Tongue

> SchomerR

In this case, the teenager involved accepted immediately that he had broken the rules and should be punished. When another teenager was banned from the island, and from sections of the forum, after behaviour that the project director considered to be abusive and destructive the ensuing discussion was more heated.

The offender annoyed others by his first, flippant response within the forum

> lol that was fun last night:P/.

> Gonna play wow [World of Warcraft] now:D

Forum comments made it clear that deciding an appropriate punishment was important, but that it was also important that the culprit should recognise what he had done wrong, take steps to avoid doing it again and recognise the effect that his behaviour had had on other members of the community.

> I don't think he's going to recognise that he's hurt a lot of people. And unless I'm very much mistaken he just called me a dumbass. Yet another breach of AUP and offending yet another

person. This has gone too far. He has put a lot into schome park, but just because someone has put a lot into something does not mean he should be excluded from the rules everyone else has to follow.

<div align="right">SchomerO</div>

Members of the community did not let the matter drop and worked hard to understand what had happened, why it had happened and what a suitable response would be. Eventually, the offender shifted his position, abandoning his apparently unconcerned stance in order to explain his actions in a post that also offered a partial apology for what had happened.

> I was annoyed after anyother c*** [asterisks added by a teenaged moderator] day at school like it always is, I was really bored and irritated that my spaceship's front was still not completed and SchomerY had be sub consiously been trying to take [a building within Schome Park] from me (in my opinion).

There are problems with maintaining order in this way. This was a protracted process – the discussion in this place continued for a week – and it demanded time and emotional engagement from many members of the community. The Safety Department organised by the teenagers identified many of the issues involved and hosted meetings and discussions that tried to resolve them. The proposed agenda for one meeting read

> * Decide whether weapons are allowed or not, and sort out details
>
> * Helpdesk?
>
> * Set up a quick, easy help system for when someone is in trouble
>
> * Police?
>
> * Sort out rules to do with e-assaults, threats etc
>
> * Make everyone aware of Safety Regulations

<div align="right">SchomerR</div>

Teenagers worked together to maintain order within their environment, although this was often a difficult and frustrating process. They were willing to discuss the issues involved and they often challenged views expressed by other teenagers and by members of staff. Their engagement suggests that resolving conflict in learning situations can usefully be approached from the point of view of equality and negotiation rather than that of power and imposition.

The teenagers were also proactive in finding ways of rewarding success and marking expertise. Established teenaged members of the community were invited to join the Hawaiian Shirts [HS]. This recognised their engagement but was also associated with extra responsibilities, such as acting as 'buddy' to new arrivals. The criteria for becoming a Hawaiian Shirt, and the reasons for these were discussed and agreed by the community.

> by posting it shows other that you are looking through the furom and that your informed and by participating in world means that you are active. Being a HS allows you to buddy someone. if you dont use the furom you cant really help your buddy if he asks you something about the furom.

> sure you can find ways around this,like you dont have to post showing you use the furom but it shows you that you say your ideas. and you can be in world and just build and burn up the 10 hrs quickly but that doesnt show you active in community events

<div align="right">SchomerQ</div>

Teenagers had to engage with Second Life, the wiki and the forum before they could become a Hawaiian Shirt – their peers monitored this engagement and agreed who was eligible to take on this role. It was also the teenagers who initiated the practice of awarding 'barnstars' in the wiki for engaging with the community by, for example, working 'hard taking pictures and uploading them to the wiki, giving a wide variety of images and media to use' or for hard work 'in the area of media, coming up with session ideas or attending regular sessions' (Schome Community, 2008b).

Real-world concerns

Teenagers in Schome Park were able to take responsibility for – or to share responsibility with adults for – designing the environment, developing the curriculum and maintaining order within the community. The willingness of many of them to do this, and the time and energy they put into these activities, suggest that they could also do this in their day-to-day lives. Their forum postings indicate the different perspectives that learners bring to these issues, and suggest that schools, teachers and pupils could benefit from a more equitable distribution of these tasks – rather than assuming that they are necessarily part of the role of teacher and are not appropriate for learners.

It is particularly important to apply the lessons learned in virtual worlds in everyday reality because, as the teenagers' forum posts make clear, their access to virtual worlds is constrained by factors outside their control. Some of these factors, such as computer crashes and slow Internet connections, would also affect adults. Others were more specific to children and teenagers. SchomerS reported

> i've been banned from the computer that can run SL on it. i'll only be allowed 30 mins a day online, so i'm just warning you all that this has happened...

SchomerP's access also depended on parental agreement

> we have 3 pcs in my house but my dad won't let me download anything on the other 2 so I couldn't download SL

Restrictions put in place to protect children were also a significant limitation. Schome Park was a closed island within the Teen Grid – only police-checked adults and learners who had been confirmed to be teenagers were allowed to access the area. Avatars from other areas of the Teen Grid could not access Schome Park, and avatars from Schome Park could not access the rest of the Teen Grid. This protected environment proved restrictive – there were no

opportunities for teenagers to introduce artefacts, experts or good practice from other islands – or to share what they had learned with others in world. SchomerR argued

> the grid should be semi-open, as in we can get in/out if we want and also that we can invite people from the main grid in, so that we can introduce real friends from real life to you guys and vice-versa. If you don't agree with that then that's ok, but I am sticking to us being able to come and go as we choose - it got a bit stifling stuck in that small island sometimes.

Although access to Schome Park was carefully monitored (hence the concern and fast reaction by staff when SchomerA allowed someone else to use his avatar), SchomerU explained how and why teenagers would typically bypass the child protection measures in place elsewhere on Second Life.

> I tried to sign up for the TG [Teen Second Life], but it requires you to enter a credit card number, and I couldn't be bothered to ask my parents...(this might have changed by now)(edit: you need to provide identification via PayPal or mobile phone)

> I think that most teens don't want to be lumped into the 'teen' category and miss out on the wonders of the main grid. They simply provide a false date of birth and get an adult account, which doesn't require any identification.

Breaking down the barriers

This chapter has focused on the experience of seven teenaged members of the Schome community, examining the implications their perspective has for learning and teaching both in virtual worlds and in the real world. Through their discussion of learning in a virtual world, the role of teacher is shown in a new light. Although this chapter has deliberately avoided quoting or analyzing the contribution of the Schome Park staff, it provides detailed and reflective statements from people who were actively involved in designing, building and maintaining a dynamic educational community. To these roles they brought an in-depth understanding of what it means to be a learner in the UK and the USA in the 21st century, and of the potential for fun that exists in virtual world and – by extension – in education in virtual worlds.

As the introduction to this book suggests, a valuable role of virtual worlds is the counterpoint they provide to the real world, with new understandings and new behaviours emerging as ideas and practice are developed in and exchanged between both settings. The teenagers' voices make it clear that not all the answers can, or should, be found in virtual worlds. Despite young people's presumed familiarity with these environments, their experience is that adults restrict their access to virtual worlds. Equally, not all the answers can be found in the real world, because the status and power of teenagers in schools is circumscribed by the roles associated with the label 'pupil'. The barriers that divide teachers from learners need to be examined and challenged in both worlds in order to give teachers the freedom to admit more

often that they are learners, and the learners the power to take on some of the responsibilities previously associated with teachers.

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