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The Lost Generation Meets Second Life: Teaching Literature Using a Virtual World

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The Lost Generation Meets Second Life: Teaching Literature in a Virtual World

SoTL Conference
March 10, 2011

Mary Spoto, Ph.D.
Michael Dadez, M.S.
Diane Johnson, Ed.D.
A Catholic, liberal-arts, teaching university of international consequence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Fall 2010 Headcount</th>
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<tr>
<td>Total Enrollment</td>
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<td>University College</td>
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<td>Criminal Justice Institute</td>
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## Demographics of Saint Leo University

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<th>Saint Leo University 2010 Fall I Term (UG)</th>
<th>Average Age</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Minority</th>
<th>Active Duty Military</th>
<th>Florida Residents</th>
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<td>Center for Online Learning</td>
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<td>67%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Military Locations</td>
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<td>68%</td>
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<td>36%</td>
<td>1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graduate Programs</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Objectives for Today’s Session

• Experience educational content within the Second Life virtual world

• See how applying “immersion” learning theory combined with technology can provide an authentic learning experience.
Ten Statements about Immersion Learning

• Learning is a basic function of human beings. We are designed to learn.
• The learning process can be broken into two parts: first, modalities or means of learning and second, sources of learning.
• We have three primary modalities or means of learning: Heart (feeling), Mind (thinking) and Body (acting or experiencing).
• These modalities or means of learning are part of complex, interrelated learning system within us.
• When any of these modalities are ignored, the quality of the learning declines.

Ten Statements about Immersion Learning

- The sources of learning or information comes from three places: (1) Self (2) Others, and (3) Nature or the Universe.
- The natural learning system functions best when the learner is completely immersed in the learning event.
- Our most powerful life experiences typically take place in a total immersion context, engaging all three of the modalities of learning and gathering information from all three sources.
- Most human designed learning experiences fail to take the natural learning system into account.
- Corporate training is even worse. It ignores the natural learning system, generally appealing to only one or two of the learning modalities and completely ignores the concept of source.

Conclusion:

*Immersion Learning* programs are designed to appeal to all three of our natural learning modalities while placing the learner in a context that allows all three learning styles to be present.

In 2007, the President of Saint Leo University sent out some information about the Second Life Virtual World encouraging staff and faculty to explore possible uses.

Michael Dadez began exploring Second Life and developed a presence for the University within this virtual world.

Michael began by purchasing land and building a replica of the University’s main campus in Saint Leo, Florida.

Next, we began to explore possible academic uses for Second Life as an instructional strategy within our online classes.
Second Life as an Instructional Strategy

The Survey of Major Writers of the 20th Century course was chosen for implementation of the initial pilot of this strategy. Through applying what students have learned in their online classroom, students digitally experience the world in which Hemingway lived and worked.
Methodology: Background

- **ENG 311 Survey of Major Writers of the 20th Century:** a general education literature course, surveying major movements and writers of the 20th century.
- Offered online in an eight week/eight module format.
- Includes a study of the historical and cultural influences shaping the literature of the time.

The Second Life experience occurs in Module 3 (week three) of the course, with preparation for the activity occurring in Modules 1 and 2.
Prior to their Second Life experience, students are:

- instructed in the time period surrounding the writing of the novel, i.e., the WWI and post war era and Modernism.
- taught about events leading up to WWI, the art and artistic movements of the time, basic characteristics of Modernism in the arts, biography of Hemingway and the major themes in his work, and a critical article on the novel.
- exposed to major influences of the time in the arts, like Pablo Picasso and Gertrude Stein, who will later become part of the students’ Second Life experience.
Components of the Experience

• Audio file of chapter one, “A Good Café on the Place St Michel,” from *A Moveable Feast*, performed by the director of Theater at Saint Leo University

• Research and development of 1920s Paris café

• Hemingway, Picasso, and Stein avatars with conversation prompts

• Patrons of the café

• Opportunity to visit virtual Paris outside of the café.
Implementation: Scaffolding

- Development of training videos
- Preparation of avatars for students
- Setting up avatars to teleport to the café as well as other locations within Second Life
- Training students to navigate within Second Life
  - Facilitation of chat sessions with groups of students
  - Training sessions with individual students
Time to visit Paris….
Discussion board postings.

Specific discussion question dedicated to the Second Life activity:
How has your Second Life experience in 1920s Paris and listening to the excerpt from Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast* informed your understanding and appreciation of our novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, and the time period in which he wrote?

N=45 responses.

- 41 = 91% of respondents described experience as positive.
- 4 = 9% of respondents described experience as not beneficial to their understanding and appreciation of the novel.
Sample student discussion board responses:

I do appreciate the novel and its combination with the Second Life experience. I feel it helped capture the general feeling of that time in history. It creates a well rounded view of Paris and the people in that era. The music and scenery in Second Life mixed with the imagery derived from the novel The Sun also Rises definitely aids the reader in a broader understanding of the way it felt to live in that time. A Movable Feast describes the basics of life and times in The Sun Also Rises....The novel and Second Life represent a time in many individuals lives and the effects of what followed the war. That is what I took away from the Second Life experience, the excerpt from A Moveable Feast, and The Sun Also Rises.
The virtual tour of Paris 1920s Café, the Eiffel Tower and Notre Dame offered a much better understanding of the characters and scenes in *The Sun Also Rises*. It gave **more perspective and helped to paint the picture of how these characters may have navigated through life**. It also filled in some blanks for me and answered some minor questions. By understanding the era and culture of 1920s Paris a little better, I am more able to relate to the characters; they become more alive to my mind's eye. Despite the lack of descriptive language, Hemingway developed complex characters and hidden messages about the search for meaning in life during this time in history.
The virtual walkthrough of 1920s Paris enhanced my appreciation for Hemingway’s uncanny ability to transform words into brilliant imagery that seems to jump off of the book’s pages and envelop the reader. … Before signing into the Second Life program for the first time, I tried to recreate the imagery of the various pubs based on the contents of the story. I was refreshingly surprised to see that my mental depiction of Paris wasn’t too far off from what the software projected. The bar was indeed dim and had an aristocratic “red-velvety” sort of feel to it. I imagined Hemingway sitting in some secluded corner, drawing from the pub’s energy and aesthetics to gain inspiration for the body of his work…. Without Second Life, I was still able to gain a somewhat decent grasp of what life would be like in the 1920s. After navigating through the program, however, I’m compelled to read the novel again to immerse myself further into the experience. This was an ingenious concept of incorporating modern technology into the digestion of a timeless literary classic.
...but I am also somewhat troubled by my own realizations during this exercise. They brought about questions as to how much I needed the virtual world to shed light on details that were once easy for me to imagine. How did readers do such a wonderful job before all of this? I believe this whole learning process not only helped me see and understand more things about Hemingway’s world but about myself also and the distractions that are introduced during the lost generation’s time period (technology, loss of faith, communication, etc.) that have now become so intense that they have dulled our imagination to some degree. I digress because as I think of all of this, I also think of how great this particular exercise was and have to thank technology for this.
As I stood in the café in Second Life, and pensively gazed at Hemingway sitting there at the table, I felt I was in the room with him and intruding, yet invited to intrude, in on his thoughts and life, to participate in the gathering of his emotion to pen his novel, *The Sun Also Rises*. Watching him there alone, helped me to appreciate, the period of the novel’s 1920s Paris in the book. Every time Jake hailed a taxi to go to the Café Select in the first half of the book and when he hailed a taxi to go to the cafe in Book II, while in Spain, the Second Life cafe help me to envision the various cafe scenes throughout the novel. **Experiencing Second Life version of the 1920s café while reading *The Sun Also Rises*, made the story more true to life.**
Implications

- Changing a student’s learning environment appears to enhance a student’s learning experience.
- Authentic learning within an immersive virtual environment appears to provide an opportunity for deeper learning.
- Immersion Learning appears to provide an avenue of relevance for adult learners.
- Constructivist Learning Theory is the framework for Immersion Learning.
- There are distinct possibilities for the inclusion of Immersion Learning opportunities based on the use of this technology as an innovative instructional strategy.
The concept of “immersion learning” is based on constructivist learning theory: students learn best by doing, the more hands-on the better. By applying what they have learned in the online classroom, students experience the world in which Hemingway lived and worked....

So now it’s your turn....We invite you to navigate within the Second Life virtual world...
Questions???