

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON NEW HORIZONS IN EDUCATION  
INTE2012

## What is it about Field Trips? Praxis, Pedagogy and Presence in Virtual Environments

Dr. Lesley Procter<sup>a</sup>

*University of Otago, Dunedin 9054 New Zealand*

---

### Abstract

Teaching Faculty in Humanities and Social Science disciplines often struggle to find ways to facilitate students' understanding of theoretical concepts. In the Higher Education environment, we may neglect the "hands-on" strategies used so effectively in earlier educational contexts—to our students' detriment in some cases.

Recent moves towards situated and problem-based learning in Higher Education offer productive possibilities to incorporate all these modes of learning. In this paper, I argue that one specific pedagogical initiative—the field trip—offers productive opportunities for praxis in disciplines where it is not commonly considered as a teaching strategy. More specifically, I shall suggest that the traditional field trip can be usefully situated within an emerging field—virtual pedagogy—through the delivery of teaching strategies in virtual environments. I shall argue that, far from rebottling old wine, the virtual field trip combines situated, problem-based learning with praxis in excitingly new ways. Further, I suggest that the enhanced sense of presence provided by multi-user virtual environments (MUVEs) offers Teaching Faculty in Higher Education contexts a surprisingly effective way to introduce students to complex theoretical concepts through playful experimentation. To illustrate my argument, I shall draw on personal experience of one such teaching initiative at graduate level—a Sociology graduate field trip to a MUVE called Second Life.

© 2012 Published by Elsevier Ltd. Selection and/or peer-review under responsibility of The Association of Science, Education and Technology. Open access under [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).

Key words: Multi-User Virtual Environments, praxis, presence, Second Life, situated learning, virtual field trip

---

<sup>a</sup> E-mail address: [lesley.procter@otago.ac.nz](mailto:lesley.procter@otago.ac.nz)

## 1. Introduction

Those teaching social science disciplines in Higher Education contexts seldom question the necessity of social theory. However, as Silver and Perez (1998) point out, attempting to follow through with that viewpoint in the classroom is often frustrating—even more so when we attempt to encourage students to relate theory to their own experiences. Kindling nascent sociological imaginations requires overcoming student passivity and fear about theory (Rinehart, 1999). Because theory challenges students to question taken for granted assumptions about familiar issues, it is seldom easy. Familiar habits of thought and the emotional ties to these may cause students to resist analysing them in new ways. This resistance can foster ‘traditional’ teaching, in which instructors lecture about theories drawn from assigned texts. This approach discourages creative thinking. Students may learn theories by rote and thereby fail to connect them to their own lives” (Silver & Perez, 1998).

In my experience these comments are especially pertinent in the micro-sociology classroom where students grapple with identity, subjectivity and complex theoretical concepts. Such concepts are not only harder to achieve “distance” from, but are also often personally threatening. If, for example a class session involves the social construction of gendered identity, how difficult might it be for individuals — who, in their late teens or early twenties, are in the “thick” of constructing such an identity—to engage intellectually with concepts of normativity, gendered hegemony, or performativity? Passive and shallow learning of enough concepts to “pass the test” reduces the threat level, allowing students to demonstrate a degree of mastery without grappling with the underlying, and perhaps threatening, issues.

As teachers, how do we overcome these problems? Various pedagogic strategies exist to foster active rather than passive learning. Although it lies beyond the scope of this discussion to enumerate these in any depth, many such strategies fall within a broadly constructivist learning paradigm that advocates learners be “immersed in situated, problem-based learning environments that replicate real-world activity structures” (Albon, 2003). Despite the undoubted efficacy of such strategies, within the micro-sociology classroom the problem of personal immersion within the very phenomena under analysis may remain and continue to affect students' willingness to engage in critical reflection. Ainley observes, for example, that students are reluctant to contextualise “the ‘choices’ they believe they have freely arrived at” (Ainley, 2006 p.74). Despite the slightly different context to which he applies his observations, Ainley’s students are remarkably similar those in a micro-sociology class who may reject arguments for the social construction of identity and gender with assertions of individuality and arguments that there are ‘always exceptions,’ resulting in a superficial engagement with ‘just enough’ theory to complete assignments.

Pedagogies grounded in preferences for active, reflective, and critical engagement with concepts are, therefore, often in tension with students’ reluctance to think about how “you ‘Become What You Are’” (as Ainley puts it). Students' immersion in the instrumental logic of their times, and the commodification of contemporary Higher Education<sup>b</sup> may exacerbate this reluctance. Since understanding this “becoming” is fundamental to micro-sociology, finding strategies to overcome such reluctance is vital. If, as Gadamer (1975) suggests, everyday life consists of the challenge posed to the familiar by the unfamiliar then how can we encourage our students to participate in this challenge? What means can we deploy to startle students out of themselves or to offer them the opportunity to re-assess their opinions in unforeseen ways

---

<sup>b</sup> For further commentary on instrumentality, commodification and the effects of neo-liberal political agendas upon higher Education, see McManus (2006), Naidoo and Jamieson (2003), and Olssen (2002).

(Kerdeman 1998; 2003)? Whatever strategies we employ to these ends, they must engage the student with theory so that the familiar may be viewed differently and connections between individual biography, history, and social structures that shape the life-course explored. I argue that the quotidian may supply “the bridge between fear and curiosity” (Sutton, 2006, p.209), by making theory less intimidating (Holtzman, 2005). I support this contention by discussing what I call praxis pedagogy and providing a brief overview of the Field Trip as an exemplar. I shall then describe a specific learning task, and briefly evaluate its effectiveness in promoting critical reflective engagement with theoretical concerns.

## 2. Praxis Pedagogy

Without doing undue violence to the rich tradition and variety of practice pedagogy, I believe that these varied forms may be combined under the heading of ‘praxis’. Within the social sciences praxis is traditionally defined in the interstices between social action, social change, and practice-based reflexivity. A more nuanced definition adds an understanding of praxis as a cycle of activity including philosophical, contextual, needs, and pragmatic considerations forming a framework designed to bridge disciplines and integrate values, research and action (Prillittensky, 2001). Praxis should be based on criteria capable of facilitating completion of the cycle of reflection, research, and social action. It comprises the interconnection between actions of different, dispersed individuals and those socially, politically, and economically embedded institutions within which individuals act and to which they contribute (Jarzabkowski, Balogun, and Seidl, 2007). Praxis has a dual nature as both an embedded concept—able to be operationalized at different levels from the micro to the macro—and also dynamic as it shifts fluidly through the interactions between levels. I am mindful of these varied perspectives on praxis as I deploy the term in a slightly different way refer to the act of putting theoretical or normative assumptions into critical, reflective practice.

With this definition in mind I approach praxis pedagogy as activity-based and inherently reflexive. Keeping practice firmly in view as a strategy, we can augment the insights offered by constructivist learning models to maximise the immersive and collaborative processes, supporting knowledge construction within the classroom learning community as a social experience (Dewey, 1973). Pedagogic strategies drawing upon Dewey’s insights include those emphasising experiential learning, authentic learning experiences and problem-based learning (PBL). These strategies have become widespread within all levels of education. Experiential learning makes the education-life-society connection clear, leads to personal growth, puts the learner directly in touch with the realities being studied (Scarce, 1997), and often involves links between out-of-classroom experiences and in-class teaching through “authentic” learning experiences (Wright, 2000). This link is one made strongly by learning experiences that are “authentic”. Authentic learning experiences arise in circumstances where the learner constructs meaning and produces knowledge; uses disciplined inquiry to construct meaning; and aims her or his work towards discourse, product and performance creations that have value or meaning beyond specific academic successes. Additionally, an authentic learning experience will involve disciplined inquiry that allows students to engage in higher order thinking and deep knowledge acquisition. Such learning is personally meaningful to the student, relates to the real world outside the classroom, and provides opportunities to think in the modes of particular disciplines (Stoddard, 2009). Opportunities for self-constructed knowledge through experiential and authentic learning contexts often also involve PBL contexts where students engage in self-paced and self-constructed knowledge acquisition by grappling with multifaceted and realistic problems requiring self-directed learning skills.

Earlier I suggested that students might be encouraged to reassess their opinions by creating links between individual biography and social milieu, and by encouraging students to explore the familiar. Such opportunities for self-constructed knowledge may not reduce the inherent threat levels, but one specific strategy might. Whereas talking about personal experience within a classroom setting might be ineffective at reducing such threat, a one-step-removed self-experience may allow just enough distance to allay anxiety. A properly constructed immersive experience such as a field trip (FT) can act in this way, taking students out of the classroom and immersing them in an environment where they can act as observers while simultaneously being participants. I see the FT, therefore, as a remarkably effective context for praxis pedagogy. FTs are exercises in 'walking the sociological imagination talk' in specific contexts beyond the classroom walls. Before discussing this strategy, it is useful to provide a brief pedagogical context.

### 3. Field Trips as learning tools

I have argued elsewhere that both the FT and its virtual equivalent, the VFT, arise out of broadly constructivist learning approaches, fostering active rather than passive learning styles (Procter, 2011). The FT also draws on understandings of the social roots of learning developed by Dewey (1973), encouraging students' sociological imaginations by challenging preconceived notions and breaking down stereotypes (Scarce, 1997). During an FT students may be engaged in pursuit of a problem, gathering and analyzing data needed to answer their questions (Boyle, 1995). The benefits inherent in these short-term, experiential learning experiences may be categorized as substantive, methodological, pedagogical and transitional (Wright, 2000). Substantively, FTs assist students to make connections to subject matter at a deeper level than can be achieved with traditional instructional methods (Wright, 2000). Methodologically, FTs allow students to actively test and generate theories (Scarce 1997). Further, observational assignments of the type undertaken during FTs are remarkably effective for research methods that rely upon and validate the use of personal experience. Pedagogically, experiential learning experiences such as the FT combine abstract, concrete, reflective, and active learning styles; encourage participants to actively participate in their own and others' learning; and provide multisensory involvement (Wright, 2000). The FT may bridge formal education and future career settings, exposing students to unfamiliar environments and teaching social interaction skills. FTs can, however, easily become disconnected from the classroom curriculum (Klemm and Tuthill, 2003) or even reinforce students' stereotypes by engaging little more than 'zoo phenomena' approaches. Additionally, unless properly planned, an FT's geographical, psychological and cognitive novelty may hinder the meaningfulness of the learning experience (Robinson, 2009). Encouraging students to make links between their personal lives and the surrounding world may also expose them to potentially traumatic matter (Wright, 2000).

The Virtual Field Trip (VFT) has similar pros and cons to its traditional counterpart and arises from similar pedagogical paradigms. A VFT is most commonly defined as an instructional approach in which a multimedia presentation brings the sights and sounds of a distant place to the learner through a computer (Klemm and Tuthill 2003). Recently, a new development has increased the 'reality quotient' in student experiences, offering increased opportunities to maximize the learning potential of the VFT. These new three-dimensional virtual environments (3-DVEs) should be defined as computer generated displays giving users a sense of being present in, and interacting with, a three dimensional environment other than the one they are actually in (Warburton, 2009; Eschenbrenner, Nah, and Siau, 2008). This sense of 'being there' generates more dynamic environments within which individuals can view objects, simulations and other users in a shared virtual space (Eschenbrenner et al. 2008). Amongst various descriptive terms for

3-DVEs, the one I find most useful is 'multi-user virtual environments' (MUVEs). A 3-DVE offers a simulation of a three dimensional world (Inoue, 2007) and is distinguished from other forms of interactive media by three characteristics: increased immersion; increased sense of fidelity in relation to immediacy of control; and higher levels of active participation (Dalgarno and Lee 2012).

More specifically, MUVEs, as a subset of 3-DVEs, possess recurrent features that reflect their genesis in the gaming worlds of multiple user domains (MUDs) and massively multiplayer online (MMO) contexts (Warburton, 2009). MUVEs are persistent in world environments, which continue to exist even when no avatars are present. Within a MUVE, interactions between individual users and between users and objects, occurs in real time, providing a sense of immediacy of action in a shared space in which multiple users may participate simultaneously. Communication within these environments is both synchronous (allowing real-time interaction through various forms of communicative capabilities such as chat and instant messaging) and asynchronous (through connections between the MUVE and various forms of social networking media such as Twitter). A MUVE possesses similarities to the real world in such features as topography, movement and physics (Warburton 2009). MUVEs allow a range of activities beyond social meetings (DeFreitas and Veletsianos, 2010), frequently promoting first person viewpoints by utilizing avatars as digital representations of users. The avatar is the key to the immersive experience. As the user's bodily representative within the MUVE, an avatar allows both a greater sense of control and a more effective engagement with the experiences as they unfold in real time (DeFreitas and Veletsianos, 2010). Each of these characteristics has significant consequences for the use of such environments as learning spaces.

One such MUVE, Second Life (SL as it is referred to by residents), is the most mature example of a new generation of immersive virtual worlds.<sup>c</sup> In SL, residents have freedom to design their avatars, create unique environments within the world that may either mirror or radically diverge from the real world. Such freedoms provide an environment where social interaction is open-ended rather than a precursor to overt goal oriented action; where transactions may occur via a tangible economic structure (Warburton, 2009); and where boundaries are persistently blurred between corporeality and transcendence, the real and the virtual, where and nowhere, and single and multiple selves (Jones, 2005). Residents do not typically think of SL as a "game," since there is no "win" scenario or any specific objective. MUVEs like SL provide a supportive platform for project-based experiential learning through experimentation, exploration, task selection, creation, and dynamic feedback (Jarmon, Traphagan, Mayrath, and Trivedi, 2009). SL provides a good fit with the constructivist learning philosophies discussed above. In SL understanding is constructed through experience and reflection, and occurs in social situations (Santo 2009), students can explore the subject matter in a sensory-rich environment, direct their own learning, see their own and each others avatars, and interact both with other avatars and with objects. Teachers can utilize various inworld systems of communication to provide prompts for

---

<sup>c</sup> SL is the creation of Linden Lab, a San Francisco-based company set up by CEO Philip Rosedale to launch a 3-D world. SL went live in June 2003 and its growth has been widely cited as exceptional. Numbering still only 180,000 residents in April 2006, SL has grown to over 25 residents worldwide by 2012. Use rates number some 1.3 million log-ins over a 60-day period, with between 45,000 and 70,000 regularly online at any one time (Shepherd, 2011). SL appeals to a very broad demographic: 57.2% of users are male; 42.8% are female; and 72.1% of the population is over 25 years of age (Worldwide, 2011). SL statistics are somewhat unreliable however because more people register than actively participate and many users have more than one account (called "alts" in SL parlance), making the actual demographics of SL questionable. Users online at any one time may also include "bots" which are accounts operated by a computer program rather than human user. For these reasons, user statistics may be inaccurate.

learning, build their own teaching environment, or import audio and video items. All residents can purchase objects, store them in their inventories, or share them in various ways (Jarmon et al., 2009). Experiences avatars have in these interactions can correlate to challenges met outside the MUVE itself due to elided distinctions between real and make believe that occurs as a result of playing social roles and imitating others' social roles (Jarmon et al., 2009). SL does have some disadvantages however. To run the software requires a computer system with high-end graphics capabilities, high screen resolution, and a high-speed Internet connection. The platform itself takes time to master even basic skills such as moving and communicating and advanced skill such as building, scripting and animating take further time to acquire (Santo, 2009). The harassment of residents through such activities as shooting, object destruction, or sexual advances—known as 'griefing'—may also expose students to risk (Kluge & Riley 2008; Santo 2009). Despite these issues SL has many characteristics that can facilitate innovation in pedagogy. The richness of the environment maximizes interaction, visualization and contextualization. The immersive 3-D environment, simulation, increased sense of presence and community combine to make content production and identity play inherently social and experiential processes (Macedo and Morgado, 2009).

Presence is a characteristic of persistent, synchronous MUVES, describing the effect people experience when interacting with a computer-mediated or -generated environment. Presence is the illusion that a mediated experience is unmediated (Lombard & Ditton 1997), involving a sense of being present in the environment. We do not leave the real world behind when we enter a MUVE. Instead we bring our experiences inside the MUVE and integrate it into our experiences there (Carassa, Morganti, and Triassa, 2004). Action and presence are dialectically intertwined as we recognize the meanings of what we see and do through presence and those understandings become integrated into our future. MUVE presence offers users a first person action participation that has an enhanced sense of 'really' being there. The more immersive the system becomes, the more it cuts students off from the real environment and gives them a sense of personal identification with their avatar, favouring the egocentric model for students' representation (Mikropoulos, 2006). Social presence—or co-presence (the sense of being there together)—further enhances this identification. The enhanced sense of presence created by the latest MUVES allows students to bring their real world with them, identify with their avatars, and yet maintain a sense of real world/MUVE separation. It is in this space, I believe, that critical analysis may flourish.

#### 4. Taking a virtual field trip

In 2009, 2010, and 2012 I taught a micro-sociology Bachelor of Arts Honours class,<sup>d</sup> that focused on issues of identity and tensions between visible and invisible options for identity construction. The theoretical framework centers on the social constructionist paradigm primarily, but students were also expected to be familiar with the concepts of subalternity and Foucauldian discourses of power. Within this framework the course concentrated upon the interplay of individual agency and social structures at the micro (or individual) level, enabling students to examine the degree of agency individuals might (or might not) have in the construction and maintenance of identity.

---

<sup>d</sup> In the New Zealand system the Honours year is a fourth year of study, completed after a three-year course of Undergraduate study, and ending with the submission of a short Dissertation on a research topic of the student's choice. Students also complete courses for credit during this fourth year. The Honours year is therefore a mix of guided study and individual research and students are referred to as Postgraduates for administrative purposes although they do not graduate with their degree until the end of this year.

In keeping with University regulations for assessment, students in this class were assessed in a range of different tasks. Their final assessment comprises a long essay examining the issues focused upon during the course. Leading up to this essay, students were given opportunities to engage in “field work” to test the theoretical concepts discussed in class, allowing them to begin with personal experience and move from there to a more theoretical understanding of the relevant issues. The fieldwork task required students to create a Second Life account; modify their avatar as they chose and document the decisions they made during this process in their field notes. At the conclusion of this part of the course, students were required to write a Field Report, which included a short description of their experience and an analysis of both the constraining and the enabling factors they experienced. The Field Report was intended to act as an illustrative exemplar for the theoretical analysis required of them for the final essay. The VFT provided practical experience of identity construction, requiring conscious awareness of the choices made during the avatar creation and modification. It was intended to mimic the unconscious choices individuals make in the presentation of their identity in everyday life. By extension, the task aimed to get students to notice the implicit elements at play in identity construction and presentation, and to “bring to life” the theoretical concepts arising out of the set reading for the class.

Prior to undertaking the VFT class time was dedicated to reading and discussing research articles on SL, viewing video tutorials provided by Linden Lab employees, and clarifying the specifics of the task. Students then spent a total of 6 hours of supervised computer laboratory time during which they created their SL account, made basic modifications to their avatar and completed the tutorials provided for new Second Life residents. Once students had learned the basics of moving about inworld and had made some basic modifications to their avatars, they were shown some virtual malls and given “spending money” to further modify their avatars in any way they chose. I remained on site inworld with them to answer any questions they might have but took no part in their explorations.<sup>c</sup> Each lab session was followed by discussions to enable students to reflect on their experience and to take any further notes they felt they might need.

## 5. Evaluating The Initiative

My decision to treat this initiative as a scoping study of practical factors and limitations and the small class sizes, meant that I initially chose not to formally evaluate the project through quantitative means. In 2012, however, a slightly larger class (7 students) meant that I could conduct a very limited survey using Likert scale and open-ended questions to gauge their prior MUVE experience and their pre-VFT and post-VFT perspectives on the task. The reflexive nature of the assessment task also allowed me to use the Field Report as feedback on students’ experiences during the VFT because they were asked to comment on enabling and constraining features they encountered. Feedback from the students suggests that the practical problems associated with creating their avatar brought the theoretical considerations to life, fleshing out the degree to which social construction guided their choices and opinions in-world. Students also reported conflicts between the normative appearances available to them and their desired identity outcomes. From a teaching perspective the task worked remarkably well in practical terms. Students were

---

<sup>c</sup> Due to the public nature of malls (virtual or real), this exercise did not require ethical approval as it came under the category of naturalistic observation in a public place. However, the author’s personal understanding of ethical implications for research in virtual worlds—which are not, as is often assumed by inexperienced researchers, always understood by residents to *be* public space—necessitated instructing the students not to respond to any communication from non-class members; and asking them not to take any screen capture shots that included anyone but themselves or other class members.

quickly engaged in the practical aspects of the task. In 2009 and 2010, only one student in each year had any prior MUVE experience and none had ever had an SL account. In 2012 all but one student had prior MUVE experience and one had briefly created a previous SL account. The pre-VFT theoretical and orientation discussions were valuable preparation and saved time when students were faced with the practicalities of SL existence in the computer lab. Difficulties in mastering basic skills took more time than anticipated, however, and one student was very difficult to keep ‘on task’, frequently distracting other students. This student had a number of years experience in World of Warcraft and his Field Report indicated that he found the “pointlessness” of SL “annoying.”

The Field Reports in each year indicated that significant learning gains occurred. One student wrote: “meanings are constructed as humans engage with Second Life through their virtual selves ... I often unconsciously ascribed meanings to the different appearances available and made conscious choices whether to include or exclude those appearances from my avatar.” This student concluded, “My own cyber-ethnographic experience in constructing an avatar in Second Life showed me that the possibilities to create a unique identity are both seemingly infinite and constrained simultaneously”. For her, the virtual experience emphasized the continuum between agency and structure that epitomises identity construction in real life. All students were able to reflexively analyse from the particular of their experience to the general of wider societal forces. Thus the VFT successfully overcame any nascent reluctance to engage intellectually with theoretical concerns.

All students commented on the importance of appearance in SL and were able to identify tensions between apparently limitless opportunities and actual constraints. A student from the 2010 class wrote “in my experience in constructing my avatar, it was clear that I experienced definite restrictions on what I could and could not fashion her to be ... the large majority of my choices were limited to highly provocative, loud items that expressed sexual desire. This supposed liberating form of power that I was meant to be employing was being suppressed by another power above me. The biggest constraint I noticed was the pressure to conform my avatar to absolute, hegemonically normative, femininity”. By personalising her avatar experience, this student expresses a willingness to think about how ‘you “Become What You Are”’ (Ainley, 2006).

Students reported some anxieties that would need to be carefully managed in a larger class. A student on the 2009 class commented that “as a computer game virgin, I was daunted because I was unsure whether I would have enough technology skills to firstly download Second Life, and secondly to be able to work it. I also felt somewhat worried that I may enjoy it so much I would become ‘addicted’ to the online virtual world.” Another student commented on the speed with which she identified with her avatar—“I wanted to buy lots of different hot outfits for my avatar, who, at this point, I’ve become quite fond of.” These are significant issues not only in terms of the positive elements of “presence” and “fidelity” discussed in the literature as amplifying the sense of immersion in MUVES, but also as potentially limiting factors on students’ abilities to engage in analysis.

I was able to compare final essays for this class for 2009, 2010, and 2012 with those from 2008 when no VFT was undertaken. On the basis of this admittedly limited sample I am convinced of the benefit of the initiative, although I would refine the experience further. Students in 2008 had struggled to really understand the course material and to apply it to examples they chose as case studies. In subsequent years, SL was the only case study and all students had practical in-world experiences on which to focus as they engaged with the classroom work. A 2012 student commented in the post-VFT responses that “for the whole time I’ve been at Uni [sic] I have never put theory into practice, so I absolutely loved being able to

get amongst what we had been learning and better understand it." Another in the same year commented that one of the positive aspects of the VFT was "seeing everything that we had discussed in class from the various readings play out in front of me." As a learning strategy, therefore, the VFT facilitated deeper understanding by placing the learner's experience at the center of the learning process. Students benefited more fully, therefore, from the four steps of the experiential learning cycle: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Jarmon et al., 2009).

## 6. Best Practice Suggestions

From past iterations of the SL VFT I can comment on best practice aspects for field trips or immersive experiences in MUVES. Prior to the VFT, teachers should familiarise themselves with the environment and ensure that they are able to assist students in basic skills as required. Students should be well prepared to engage in actual onsite activities by undertaking orientation discussions and viewing any tutorials provided by the MUVE operators. Purposeful planning of the trip should include a clearly identified purpose for the visit, specific activity guidelines, and careful alignment of the VFT with classroom content. Students should have enough autonomy during the VFT to effectively engage in the activities, but regular "check ins" are advisable to ensure students remain on task and do not succumb to the distractions MUVES like SL provide. After the VFT, allow discussion time for students to 'de-brief' and to add to their field notes. These discussions provide valuable opportunities to assist students in interpreting the actual experience and to connect their learning with the classroom curriculum. Finally, it is worth attending to the practicalities of computer lab set-up. Ideally there should be enough terminals for students to have one each, the teacher should be able to move freely around the class to assist where needed, and it is helpful if the teacher's terminal is linked to a large screen that all students can see. One final comment—always allow twice as much time as you think you need!

In conclusion, I found this learning task remarkably effective as a means to engage students in theoretical concepts. The VFT provided students a one-step-removed space, allowing their avatar to operate as a projection of self that protected them from any perceived threat to their personal philosophies, but at the same time also challenged them through the avatar's perspective to confront the reality of those philosophies interacting with social structures. Class discussion prior to the VFT had frequently returned to restatements of the potential for agency and the exception-to-the-rule argument. After their inworld experience students were able to question these assumptions and their final essays reflected a willingness to contextualize their quotidian in the structural milieu.

## References

- Ainley, P. (2006). *Learning About Learning in a New University C-SAP Monography No 8: Learning and Teaching Social Theory* (Vol. 8, pp. 67-83). Birmingham: Birmingham University.
- Albon, R. (2003). *Assessment drives the learning: Raising the bar*. Paper presented at the Evaluations and Assessment Conference, Adelaide, Australia.
- Boyle, C. E. (1995). *Gender in Everyday Life: A field trip to the Mall*. *Teaching Sociology*, 23(2), 150-154.
- Carassa, A., Morganti, F., & Tirassa, M. (2004). *Movement, Action, and Situation: Presence in Virtual Environments*. Paper presented at the 7th International Workshop on Presence, Valencia, Spain.
- DeFreitas, S., & Veletsianos, G. (2010). *Editorial: Crossing Boundaries: Learning and teaching in virtual worlds*. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 41(1), 3-9.
- Delgado, B., & Lee, M. (2010). *What are the Learning Affordances of 3-D Virtual Environments?* *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 41(1), 69-85.

- Dewey, J. (1973). *The Philosophy of John Dewey*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Eschenbrenner, B., Nah, F. F.-H., & Siau, K. (2008). Research Note: 3-D Virtual Worlds in Education: Applications, Benefits, Issues, and Opportunities. *Journal of Database Management*, 19(4), 91-110.
- Gadamer, H.-G. (1975). *Truth and Method*. London: Sheed & Ward.
- Holtzman, M. (2005). Teaching Sociological Theory Through Active Learning: The Irrigation Exercise. *Teaching Sociology*, 33(3), 206-212.
- Inoue, Y. (2007). Concepts, Applications, and Research of Virtual Reality Learning Environments. *International Journal of Human and Social Sciences*, 2(1), 107.
- Jarmon, L., Traphagan, T., Mayrath, M., & Trivedi, A. (2009). Virtual World Teaching, Experiential Learning, and Assessment: An interdisciplinary communication course in Second Life. *Computers & Education*, 52, 169-182
- Jarzabkowski, P., Balogun, J., & Seidl, D. (2007). Strategizing: The challenges of a practice perspective. *Human Relations*, 60(1), 5-27.
- Jones, D. (2006). I, Avatar: Constructions of Self and Place in Second life and the Technological Imagination. *Gnovis*, 6.
- Kerdeman, D. (1999). Hermeneutics and Education: Understanding, Control and Agency. *Educational Theory*, 48(2), 241-266.
- Kerdeman, D. (2003). 'Pulled up short': Challenging self-understanding as a focus of teaching and learning. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 37(2), 293-308.
- Klemm, B., & Tuthill, G. (2003). Virtual Field Trips: Best Practices. *International Journal of Instructional Media*, 30(2), 177-193.
- Kluge, S., & Riley, L. (2008). Teaching in virtual Worlds: Opportunities and Challenges. *Issues in Informing Science and Information Technology*, 5, 127-135.
- Lombard, M., & Ditton, T. (1997). At The Heart Of It All: The Concept Of Presence. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 3(2).
- Macedo, A., & Morgado, L. (2009). Learning to Teach in Second life. [http://www.edenonline.org/contents/conferences/OCRCs/Porto/AM\\_LM.pdf](http://www.edenonline.org/contents/conferences/OCRCs/Porto/AM_LM.pdf)
- McManus, R. (2006). Marketing a Monster?: Teaching social theory in the globalised market of New Zealand higher education. In J. Cope, J. Canaan & D. Harris (Eds.), *C-SAP Monograph No. 8: Learning and Teaching Social Theory* (Vol. 8, pp. 146-170). Birmingham: Birmingham University.
- Mikropoulos, T. (2006). Presence: A unique characteristic in educational virtual environments. *Virtual Reality*, 10, 197-206.
- Naidoo, R., & Jamieson, I. (2003). Empowering Participants or Corroding Learning? Toward a Research Agenda on the Impact of Student Consumerism in Higher Education. *Journal of Educational Policy*, 20(3), 267-281.
- Olssen, M. (2002). The Restructuring of Tertiary Education in New Zealand: Governmentality, Neo-liberalism, Democracy. *McGill Journal of Education*, 37(1), 57-78.
- Prillitsensky, I. (2001). Value-Based Praxis in Community Psychology: Moving Toward Social Justice and Social Action. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 29(5), 747-778.
- Procter, L. (2011). *Virtual Field Trips: Reflecting on Postgraduate Students' Experiments With Identity Construction in Second Life*. Paper presented at the International Conference of Education, Research and Innovation, Madrid, Spain.
- Rinehart, J. A. (1999). Turning Theory Into Theorizing: Collaborative Learning in a Sociological Theory Course. *Teaching Sociology*, 27(3), 216-232.
- Robinson, L. (2009). Virtual Field Trips: The pros and cons of an educational innovation. *Computers in New Zealand Schools: Learning, Teaching, Technology*, 21(1), 1-17.
- Santo, S. (2009). Teaching in Second Life: A virtual world.
- Scarce, R. (1997). Field Trips as Short-Term Experiential Education. *Teaching Sociology*, 25(3), 219-226.
- Shepherd, T. (2011). Second Life Grid Survey - Economics Metrics Retrieved September, 2011, from <http://gridsurvey.com/economy.php>
- Silver, I., & Perez, G. (1998). Teaching Social Theory Through Students' Participant-Observation. *Teaching Sociology*, 26(4), 347-353.
- Stoddard, J. (2009). Toward a Virtual Field Trip Model for the Social Sciences *Contemporary Issues in the Social Sciences*, 9(4), 412-438.
- Sutton, P. (2006). Extracting Sunbeams out of Cucumbers? A Pedagogic Strategy for Engaging Students in Social Theory. In J. Cope, J. Canaan & D. Harris (Eds.), *C-SAP Monograph No. 8: Learning and Teaching Social Theory* (Vol. 8, pp. 195-213). Birmingham: Birmingham University.
- Warburton, S. (2009). Second life in Higher Education: Assessing the potential for and barriers to deploying virtual worlds in learning and teaching. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 40(3), 414-426.
- Worldwide, K. (2011) Retrieved September, 2011, from <http://www.kzero.co.uk>
- Wright, M. C. (2000). Getting More out of Less: The benefits of short-term experiential learning in Undergraduate Sociology courses. *Teaching Sociology*, 28(2), 116-126.