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Title

Developing a Second Life virtual field trip for university students : an action research approach / Shane Mathews, Lynda Andrews and Edwina Luck

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Abstract

Background: Integrating 3D virtual world technologies into educational subjects continues to draw the attention of educators and researchers alike. The focus of this study is the use of a virtual world, Second Life, in higher education teaching. In particular, it explores the potential of using a virtual world experience as a learning component situated within a curriculum delivered predominantly through face-to-face teaching methods. Purpose: This paper reports on a research study into the development of a virtual world learning experience designed for marketing students taking a Digital Promotions course. The experience was a field trip into Second Life to allow students to investigate how business branding practices were used for product promotion in this virtual world environment. The paper discusses the issues involved in developing and refining the virtual course component over four semesters. Methods: The study used a pedagogical action research approach, with iterative cycles of development, intervention and evaluation over four semesters. The data analysed were quantitative and qualitative student feedback collected after each field trip as well as lecturer reflections on each

cycle. Sample: Small-scale convenience samples of second- and third-year students studying in a Bachelor of Business degree, majoring in marketing, taking the Digital Promotions subject at a metropolitan university in Queensland, Australia participated in the study. The samples included students who had and had not experienced the field trip. The numbers of students taking part in the field trip ranged from 22 to 48 across the four semesters. Findings and Implications: The findings from the four iterations of the action research plan helped identify key considerations for incorporating technologies into learning environments. Feedback and reflections from the students and lecturer suggested that an innovative learning opportunity had been developed. However, pedagogical potential was limited, in part, by technological difficulties and by student perceptions of relevance. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)