Contribution Details

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EERA Network: **16. ICT in Education and Training**
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Inter-Life: Community, Identity, and Transition through Creative Engagement

1723

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Proposal Information
(e.g. topic, research question, objective, conceptual or theoretical framework …)

This project has created a highly innovative three-dimensional (3D) virtual community called 'InterLife Island', and an associated communications infrastructure that is accessible though mobile technologies. Inter-Life Island is a place where young people can 'reconfigure' their life experiences and challenges in ways that help them to gain new perspectives, and explore new solutions to these challenges through a range of activities including visual and expressive arts. The island provides tools, resources, contexts and networks of support that extend the possibilities available to young people in the 'real world', in an attempt to push the boundaries of what Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) might achieve in the cognitive, social and affective domains. The project is adopting Activity Theory as an overarching framework, in order to assist us in understanding the complex factors that influence the nature of interaction on the InterLife Island environment.

The project is specifically designed to research skills development by young people who are working together on InterLife Island in order to enhance their management of life transitions. This paper reports on five major objectives/questions of the project:

(i) Creating Inter-Life: an integrated educational environment of web-based and mobile technologies, that will support the development of a virtual working space for young people and their teachers (and other professionals where required) who
are engaged in activities to develop transition skills.
(ii) Developing a coherent set of educational, problem-based activities, within context-based 'scenarios', suitable for use in Inter-Life.

(iii) How participants act and develop socially in Inter-Life, while engaged in the designed creative 'scenarios',
(iv) How the opportunities to 'personalise' their involvement interact with these experiences, to effect engagement.
(v) How Inter-Life experiences contribute to Identity Formation and Self Image

The central aim of this research is to develop an integrated cultural 'context' of web-based and mobile technologies, called 'Inter-Life', and investigate how these can be used, together with a suite of 'Transition Tools', to support young people, individually, and in groups, through their key life transitions. Participants are connected to Inter-Life through their PC, mobile phone, or device, with asynchronous and real-time connections. Inter-Life is based in Second Life (Second Life, 2007), a commercial virtual reality environment. In this context, using the transition tools, we are investigating how the level of experiential and cultural 'assets' of individual and groups can be enhanced, and their ability to manage transitions, both individually and collaboratively, can be improved. This investigation focuses on how participants act and develop in Inter-Life, while engaged in two designed 'scenarios', and how the skills and understandings acquired (learning outcomes) 'map' onto their later 'real world' experiences of transition (Allan and Lewis, 2006).

Methodology or Methods/ Research Instruments or Sources Used

Identity is being used as a 'research lens' (Sfard and Prusak, 2005) through which to view the developing personal narratives that participants build in their exploration of transitions (viewing identity as individual and social construct, rather than a fixed quality or 'given'). The project is adopting mixed-method, technology-enhanced data gathering and analysis. Phenomenographic techniques (Micari et al, 2007) are being used - analyzing personal accounts of participants across a range of island settings and activities. We are adopting a case-centric approach at each stage of the analysis. The data sets are being formed from the documents created through the various scenario-based interventions in the 'Diary Room' and an e-Portfolio. This is being augmented by the collection of quantitative back-end data, logged through the software, to allow the comparison between interface-related behavioural patterns and the narrative generated by each case as they proceed through the scenarios.

Conclusions, Expected Outcomes or Findings

The intended (anticipated) learning outcomes are cognitive, affective, and social. They are brought together in an integrated way through the project-based structure of the scenario. In seeking evidence for the acquisition of identified outcome skills, we will use data acquired as a result of ongoing project activities as a major data source. This is intended to avoid overloading participants with intrusive data gathering. The Inter-Life Project team envisages that the project outputs will benefit both academic and user communities, with particular emphasis on education practitioners and young people among the user communities. Most immediate benefits will accrue to teachers, pupils, young people, and other educators who participate directly in the Inter-Life Project. We expect pupils and young people in a range of domains (looked after, gifted and talented, mainstream secondary, undergraduate) to gain skills to manage transitions more effectively and efficiently in a range of contexts. We expect that teachers and other professionals (university tutors, careers service personnel) involved with the project will develop professionally in the management of activities to promote transition skills.

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