Virtual worlds as 3-dimensional Learning Environments: A comparison of two 'Inter-Life' scenarios in different Educational settings.

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Introduction

- The role of novel technologies in enhanced learning across settings, including schools and higher education is receiving increased attention (Dede, 2009; Ketelhut et al, 2010).
- The interdisciplinary 'Inter-Life' project created two immersive, 3-dimensional virtual world islands (Lally et al, 2009; Magill et al, 2009).
- Inter-Life Island 1 (ILI-1) was established for young adults (>18 years of age) and Inter-Life Island 2 (ILI-2) for young people/adolescents (13–17 years of age).

Aim

- To investigate the suitability of virtual worlds as a novel technology to support learning of skills required to navigate challenging life transitions through the social, affective and cognitive domains.
- This study involves a comparison of two different learning 'scenarios' that were investigated as part of the 'Inter-Life' project (Figure 1).

Methods and Findings

Scenario 1 (ILI-2)

- Series of blended learning workshops (n=12) with young people who had experienced life in Care.
- Young people worked on structured and open learning activities, resulting in formation of a learning community and development of life skills such as; self-confidence, team-work, active problem-solving skills, empathy and leadership skills (Devlin et al, 2011, 2013; Lally & Sclater, 2012) (Figures 1 & 2).

Scenario 2 (ILI-1)

- Larger scale student induction event in which a cohort (n=36) of B. Tech. Ed. students participated in a creative profiling activity.
- The students creating visual, interactive profile boards for sharing amongst peers and pre-existing (post-transition) students in 'Inter-Life'.
- Results indicated the students found the activity interesting, and enjoyable, but some found it challenging, in keeping with current literature (Devlin et al, 2012; Kennedy et al, 2010) (Figures 1 & 3).

Figure 2: Scenario1: Presentation to peers 'in-world'

Figure 1

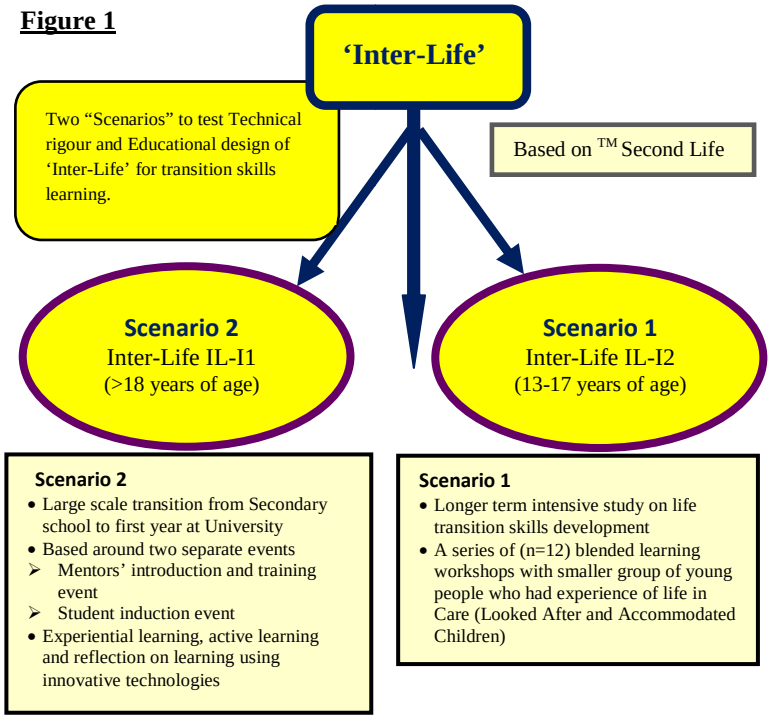

Figure 3: Scenario 2: New student group working in 'Inter-Life'

Conclusions

Through comparing two different learning scenarios, with different learners working in different settings, this present study has demonstrated 'Inter-Life' is a 'fit for purpose', new technology enhanced learning (TEL) tool. In particular, we have demonstrated:
(1) The suitability of the Inter-Life educational 'design' in alignment with the technical robustness of this innovative 'TEL' tool that supports autonomous learning and persistent web-based learner generated resources.
(2) The importance of the synergy between pedagogies and technologies, and how learners from different settings can help shape their own learning through innovative malleable technologies.

Main references

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2. Lally, V. & Sclater, M. (2012): *Research in Comparative and International Education* (2012) 7(4): pp 482-504.
3. Devlin, A.M., et al (2013): *Interactive Learning Environments*, iFirst article (pp,1-20). Link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2013.768271

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