Exploring MUVEs: Teaching Foreign Language and Culture in Second Life

Giuliana Perco, PhD
Romance Studies
Duke University

What are MUVEs?

**Multi**
**User**
**Virtual**
**Environments**
Why use MUVEs in teaching?

Advantages

- Interactivity
- Active learning (engagement)
- Collaboration
- Sense of community (social network)
- Overcoming distance
- Appeal to students’ familiarity with Web2.0 tools
- Playfulness

Drawbacks

For teachers and learners

- Technological shortcomings
- Steep learning curve
- Time investment

For learners

- Sense of being “overwhelmed”
- Fear to interact

For teachers

- Difficult transferability of skills and content
- Skepticism
- Getting funding/support
Second Life and language teaching and learning

- British Council
- Languagelabs.com
- Instituto Cervantes
- Goethe Institut
- Individual teacher’s initiatives
What’s the use of SL in language learning?

- Immersive experience
- Authentic material
- Interaction with native speakers
- Cultural aspects
IT63 & Second Life

• Fall 2008
• Spring 2009

Assignments

• Technology-related
  – Visits to orientation sims
  – SL skill tasks (taking a snapshot in SL)
  – Interaction with voice and talk chat
  – Interacting with tools (notecards, objects)

• Cultural/linguistic
  – Visits to “Italian” sims
  – Linguistic tasks (writing a report)
  – Interaction with native speakers
  – Interaction with places (treasure hunt; quest)
“Virtual tourism”

Individual/small group trip

Class trip

360° degrees immersion
Interacting with native speakers

Oral, aural, reading and writing skills

Quests/treasure hunts

Linguistic skills: reading, speaking (sharing information) writing

Technical skills: searching, taking snapshots, teleporting, interacting with objects
Presentations

Linguistic skills: oral, aural, reading, writing
Other skills: research, creativity, organization

Results (from students’ reports)

• Negative elements
  – Technical issues
  – Time requirement

• Positive elements
  – Interaction
  – Learning new things
  – Creativity
  – Language practice
  – Fun

So, is it really worth it?