Exploring the subjectivities of young people: interdisciplinary arts-based practices in virtual spaces

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Abstract
This paper explores the potential of virtual worlds to support the development of young people's voices using photography and film-making as a means by which to engage young people in sharing their own subjectivities and developing their understanding of active citizenship. Photography and filmmaking were used creatively to share and understand the world and cultural settings in which the young people were living. The virtual world environment also stimulated a wide range of playful behaviours.

A recently completed UK funded (ESRC/EPSRC) Research Council Project called Inter-Life developed a 'Virtual Research Community' in Second Life™, to investigate how young people can work creatively together to develop their own agency and develop some sense of some sense of 'ownership' of their learning. This paper is based upon research undertaken for the Inter-Life project between 2008 and 2012. The ESRC/EPSRC-funded Inter-Life Project (TLRP/TEL Phase; 2008-2011; see http://www.tlrp.org/tel/; Sclater & Lally, 2009) focused on the development of an integrated inter-cultural 'context' in a 3D platform (Second Life™), in order to investigate how young people can use it creatively - individually, and collectively - to assist in understanding and navigating their key life transitions.

This paper presents findings from the project to illustrate how the Internet can be used to create and sustain a virtual research community of young people, and how this can support their creative endeavours in pursuing their own research agendas. Over time the young people with whom we worked co-opted the tools and community setting, which were provided, for their own use, and began to articulate their own goals and agendas during a series of workshops.

Key to this process was being able to work alongside a group of young people as participant 'co-researchers' in a 'Virtual Research Community' (VRC) created in our virtual world InterLife Island 2 (ILI2). As a part of this process the research team wanted to encourage young people to express themselves in a variety of creative

ways and develop their own 'voices' as part of this process. In doing this, the research team encouraged the young people to engage in activities that might help to bring about positive transformation of themselves and their communities. Such possibilities grew out of a process of dialogue and collective exchange between participants, researchers and the wider community – teachers, parents, family and friends.

The development of critical understanding by young people through new forms of interaction, as well as issues of expression, control, creativity, and the development of voice, are areas where such research could be valuable. The subjectivities of young people are an important element of understanding youth in the process of transition. The use of virtual worlds and creative practices with young people is, we contest, a powerful combination in this research.

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