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**Peachey, Anna, Julia Gillen, Daniel Livingstone and Sarah Smith-Robbins, eds. 2010. *Researching Learning in Virtual Worlds*. London: Springer. 193pp. ISBN: 978-1-84996-046-5**

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The research methods and findings featured within the ten chapters of *Researching Learning in Virtual Worlds* share a common theme of boundary crossing. Distinct in their approaches to research and varied in their pedagogical commitments, the many contributors permeate a new frontier as they navigate between data and dialogue, quantitative and qualitative methods, physical and virtual realms, as well as other contested spaces.

The body of work contained in this edited collection reflects the collaboration between disciplines and the confluence of technologies needed to explore the politics of pedagogy as teachers, researchers and learners migrate to virtual worlds. Readers are invited to cross many boundaries traditional barriers are transcended while new obstacles take form. One obvious obstacle is that virtual worlds occupy borderlands which call into question the role of the researcher, the value of methods used, and validity of

findings, all within a landscape that requires further exploration. While some of the contributors to *Researching Learning in Virtual Worlds* see methodological value in the ambiguity of roles and the permeability of places within virtual worlds, others are determined to question this borderlands space. From game-based programs to World of Warcraft, the entries in this book explore virtual cultures, particularly what they promise and prohibit, as 21st century scholars continue to research virtual worlds, bringing with them new divides and distinctions.

Prior to reading this edited collection, one should be warned that the virtual platforms or digital cultures included in this book are few. In fact, throughout the book, the spotlight is often on Second Life where many contributors call for critical reflection on the ways in which virtual experiences in SL are approached methodologically. Although entries on Second Life are more repetitious than they are complementary, there

is merit in reading Elena Moschini's work on researching in Second Life for she is gentle to readers by providing an expansive profile of the research methods and evaluation criteria that underpin educational research projects in SL. By engaging in definitional work and by providing readers with a generous toolkit, the author of this particular chapter dedicates more space to providing answers than to asking questions.

Since the focus of this edited collection is one that concerns itself with the pedagogical interactions in virtual worlds, many of its authors explore what occurs when researchers cross curricular boundaries. As a result, readers are exposed to an array of methods, from experimental design to descriptive statistics. Although a great deal of space is reserved to quantitative methods, those interested in qualitative methods will be satisfied to learn that Carr, Oliver and Burn's chapter takes readers through a reflective journey where the collaborators document their encounters as well as the personal experiences of their teaching subjects who use SL. What this chapter highlights is that personal narratives can enrich pedagogical research, as scholars' track the various phases of learners who navigate their way through a host of virtual worlds. Another exceptional read is Julia Gillen's chapter on new literacies in Shome Park where the author applies virtual ethnography to investigate the communicative

activities that are deeply entrenched in this virtual realm. In this chapter, the author concerns herself with the future of pedagogy and the new literacy activities it permits. This causes pause for reflection on the role of teachers and learners as meaning makers who are embedded in the technologies of our time, with virtual worlds as their focal point.

Readers of *Researching Learning in Virtual Worlds* will likely appreciate the ways in which the many contributors are committed to exploring the application of varied theoretical perspectives that inform and influence educational research projects in virtual realms. By taking us on quick tours of learning theories, and by presenting findings of experimental design in SL and other borderland spaces, readers gain a sense of the changing role of the researcher, as virtual communities can radically transform research settings and subjects. At the book's conclusion, readers are likely to find themselves in a state of ambiguity with more questions than answers, particularly for the hopeful scholar wishing to pursue such a site of exploration. For starters, readers might inquire as to whether virtual worlds require a mixed-method approach, where both quantitative data and qualitative dialogue are necessary to fully account for the endless boundaries that are continually crossed. Since this book provides readers with the "how-tos" required to conduct data collection

in previously uncharted territories, there is value in reading Livingstone and Bloomfield's chapter on applying mixed-methods in mixed-worlds. However, beyond this chapter, little insight is offered as concerns the values of crossing methodological boundaries in virtual worlds.

While contributors and readers of this edited collection may be divided in seeing the value of employing mixed-methods in spaces like Second Life, they are likely to agree that virtual worlds are indeed mixed worlds. As such, readers may also question the mimetic qualities that virtual worlds offer, whereby "old" theoretical paradigms inform new spaces where research is conducted. Fortunately, the book's contributors provide a thorough account of the challenges and opportunities that virtual worlds provide – with the contested border crossing of the physical and virtual being chief among them. What many authors propose is that a mixed-world calls for new methods, as scholars permeate between spaces that are seemingly similar yet strangely unfamiliar. If there are doubts about the divisions between the two worlds, chapters four through seven make cases for the possibility of hybrid methodologies where research may be conducted, analyzed, evaluated, reported and presented within and outside of physical realms. As such, the many authors who reveal their questions and findings in these works write about the need to ac-

quire new knowledge, to expand our roles as researchers, to extend research skills and to develop novel methods and models. In sum, these authors provide compelling accounts of how resources can be acquired and roles can be developed which includes mention of software programs, supporting communities and seminal references to list a few.

As virtual spaces like Second Life continue to capture the interest of students and scholars alike, research on pedagogy in virtual worlds remind us that we are not quite as indigenous to this borderlands space as we once thought. The collection of chapters in this book demonstrates the ways in which teaching and learning in new settings have indeed moved outside of and beyond exploratory exercises. In fact, if the reader is to take one message from *Researching Learning in Virtual Worlds* it is this: virtual worlds are mixed-worlds which call for hybrid methods and new models for research where new communities of scholars and extended resources are offered. Together, the authors provide a convincing account of the ways in which virtual worlds have not only paradigmatically shifted the dynamics between teachers and learners but the ways in which we approach the spaces and subjects of our studies as well.