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Children learn social skills in Web worlds

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Contents

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THE ARTICLE

New research carried out by the BBC suggests that children aged 6-12 can learn important social skills in virtual worlds. The BBC website says: "Virtual worlds can be valuable places where children rehearse what they will do in real life." The study's lead researcher, Professor David Gauntlett, stated that children interacting with others online and exploring web worlds was better for kids than passive pastimes like watching TV. He said the children adopted different roles when they ventured through the virtual world; Some were explorers, others were social climbers, while others were fighters or collectors. Professor Gauntlet indicated that the virtual world was a safe place for children to rehearse real-life situations without the negative or painful consequences of the real world.

The BBC's research was carried out using its own Children's BBC online world called *Adventure Rock*. In it, children have to explore, create things and ask questions as they go deeper into the game. It is a closed world where children's avatars cannot meet or communicate. Kids can share tips and hints for other users on a message board, which is controlled and edited by BBC staff. There are none of the chat rooms or discussion boards normally found in virtual worlds like Second Life. The emphasis is on safety for kids in an online environment without advertising and sales gimmicks. Researchers also asked parents about their feelings towards their children spending time in *Adventure Rock*. The findings were presented at the Conference on Virtual Worlds for Children on 23 May 2008.

WARM-UPS

1. INTERNET GAMES: Walk around the class and talk to other students about Internet games. Change partners often. After you finish, sit with your partner(s) and share your findings.

2. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words from the article are most interesting and which are most boring.

research / the BBC / social skills / virtual worlds / real life / exploring / collectors / adventure / avatars / tips and hints / message board / sales gimmicks / feelings

Have a chat about the topics you liked. Change topics and partners frequently.

3. ONLINE KIDS: How many children go on line each day? Who wants and does not want kids to be online? With your partner(s), discuss what these people think about children being online. Write your ideas below. Change partners and share your ideas.

children	
parents	
games makers	
teachers	
advertising execs	
psychologists	

4. SOCIAL SKILLS: Where best can children learn social skills? Rank the items below: 10 = "an unbeatable place to learn social skills;" 1 = "a great way to produce a social misfit". Compare your answers with your partner(s).

_____ school	_____ shopping malls
_____ parks and playgrounds	_____ clubs
_____ television	_____ books
_____ the home	_____ online virtual worlds

5. HEADLINE PREDICTION: With your partner(s), use the words in the "Chat" activity above to predict what the news article will be about. Once you have your story, change partners and share them. Who was closest to the real story?

6. VIRTUAL REALITY: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the term 'virtual reality'. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

a.	Kids learn better social skills online than they do in the real world.	T / F
b.	Kids can rehearse and practice social skills when they're online.	T / F
c.	Being online in a virtual world is not as good for kids as watching TV.	T / F
d.	The virtual world teaches kids how to punch and fight.	T / F
e.	The research was done using a BBC site especially for children.	T / F
f.	Kids took part in online discussions and chat just like in the real world.	T / F
g.	The BBC site is set to make a lot of money from commercials and ads.	T / F
h.	The BBC asked parents for their feelings on their kids being online.	T / F

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

1.	virtual		a.	conducted
2	rehearse		b.	tricks
3.	ventured		c.	expressed
4.	indicated		d.	imitation
5.	consequences		e.	journeyed
6.	carried out		f.	stress
7.	avatars		g.	conclusions
8.	emphasis		h.	results
9.	gimmicks		i.	alias icon
10.	findings		j.	practice

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

1.	children aged 6-12 can learn important		a.	rehearse real-life situations
2	better for kids than passive pastimes		b.	different roles
3.	the children adopted		c.	of the real world
4.	a safe place for children to		d.	things and ask questions
5.	the negative or painful consequences		e.	gimmicks
6.	children have to explore, create		f.	like watching TV
7.	It is a closed		g.	on safety for kids
8.	Kids can share tips and		h.	social skills in virtual worlds
9.	The emphasis is		i.	hints for other users
10.	advertising and sales		j.	world

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words into the gaps in the text.

New research carried out by the BBC _____ that children aged 6-12 can learn important social skills in virtual worlds. The BBC website says: "Virtual worlds can be _____ places where children rehearse what they will do in real life." The study's lead researcher, Professor David Gauntlett, stated that children _____ with others online and exploring web worlds was better for kids than _____ pastimes like watching TV. He said the children adopted different _____ when they ventured through the virtual world; Some were explorers, others were social _____, while others were fighters or collectors. Professor Gauntlet indicated that the virtual world was a safe place for children to rehearse real-life situations _____ the negative or _____ consequences of the real world.

The BBC's research was carried out using its _____ Children's BBC online world called *Adventure Rock*. In it, children have to explore, _____ things and ask questions as they go deeper into the game. It is a closed world where children's avatars cannot _____ or communicate. Kids can _____ tips and hints for other users on a message board, which is controlled and _____ by BBC staff. There are none of the chat rooms or discussion boards normally found in virtual worlds like Second Life. The _____ is on safety for kids in an online environment without advertising and sales _____. Researchers also asked parents about their feelings towards their children spending time in *Adventure Rock*. The findings were _____ at the Conference on Virtual Worlds for Children on 23 May 2008.

LISTENING: Listen and fill in the spaces.

New research _____ BBC suggests that children aged 6-12 can learn important _____ virtual worlds. The BBC website says: "Virtual worlds can be valuable places where _____ do in real life." The study's lead researcher, Professor David Gauntlett, stated that children interacting with others online and exploring web worlds _____ than passive pastimes like watching TV. He said the children adopted different roles when _____ the virtual world; Some were explorers, others were social climbers, _____ fighters or collectors. Professor Gauntlet indicated that the virtual world _____ children to rehearse real-life situations without the negative or painful consequences of the real world.

The BBC's research was carried _____ Children's BBC online world called *Adventure Rock*. In it, children have to explore, create _____ questions as they go deeper into the game. It is a _____ children's avatars cannot meet or communicate. Kids can share tips and hints for other users on a message board, which is controlled _____ BBC staff. There are none of the chat rooms or discussion boards normally found in virtual worlds like Second Life. The _____ for kids in an online environment without advertising and sales gimmicks. Researchers also asked parents about their _____ children spending time in *Adventure Rock*. The findings were presented at the Conference on Virtual Worlds for Children on 23 May 2008.

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms … for the words **'virtual'** and **'world'**.

virtual	world

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning…?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall how they were used in the text:

• 6-12	• own
• rehearse	• deeper
• passive	• share
• roles	• none
• others	• gimmicks
• painful	• feelings

STUDENT VIRTUAL WORLDS SURVEY

Write five GOOD questions about virtual worlds in the table. Do this in pairs. Each student must write the questions on his / her own paper.

When you have finished, interview other students. Write down their answers.

	STUDENT 1 _____	STUDENT 2 _____	STUDENT 3 _____
Q.1.			
Q.2.			
Q.3.			
Q.4.			
Q.5.			

- Now return to your original partner and share and talk about what you found out. Change partners often.

- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

CHILDREN'S INTERNET DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

a) What did you think when you read the headline?

b) What springs to mind when you hear the term 'virtual world'?

c) What do your grandparents think of virtual worlds?

d) Is it a good idea to let six- and seven-year-olds roam around in virtual worlds?

e) How possible is it for children to learn social skills in an Internet game?

f) What dangers are there for young children while online?

g) Do you think wandering around in a virtual world in an online game is better than watching television?

h) Where did you learn most of your social skills, and what are they?

i) Do you think children should rehearse real-life situations or experience them for real (together with the pain)?

j) Are you an explorer, a social climber, a fighter or a collector?

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CHILDREN'S INTERNET DISCUSSION

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

a) Did you like reading this article?

b) Would you like to venture into the BBC's *Adventure Rock* world?

c) Do you think children learn more by creating things and exploring in the real world?

d) Do you have an avatar? What kind of avatar would you like?

e) Do you think children should be allowed to communicate with other users of their virtual world?

f) What do you know about other virtual worlds, like Second Life?

g) Do you think advertisers should be allowed into virtual worlds for kids?

h) How would you feel about your six-year-old spending time online?

i) What questions would you like to ask Professor David Gauntlett?

j) Did you like this discussion?

LANGUAGE

New research carried out by the BBC (1) _____ that children aged 6-12 can learn important social skills in virtual worlds. The BBC website says: "Virtual words can be (2) _____ places where children rehearse what they will do in real life." The study's lead researcher, Professor David Gauntlett, stated that children interacting with (3) _____ online and exploring web worlds was better for kids than passive pastimes (4) _____ watching TV. He said the children adopted different roles when they ventured through the virtual world; Some were explorers, others were social climbers, (5) _____ others were fighters or collectors. Professor Gauntlet indicated that the virtual world was a safe place for children to rehearse real-life situations without the negative or painful consequences (6) _____ the real world.

The BBC's research was carried out using its own Children's BBC online world called *Adventure Rock*. In (7) _____, children have to explore, create things and ask questions (8) _____ they go deeper into the game. It is a closed world where children's avatars cannot meet or communicate. Kids can share tips and hints for other users on a message board, which is controlled and edited (9) _____ BBC staff. There are (10) _____ of the chat rooms or discussion boards normally found in virtual worlds like Second Life. The (11) _____ is on safety for kids in an online environment without advertising and sales gimmicks. Researchers also asked parents about their feelings towards their children spending time in *Adventure Rock*. The (12) _____ were presented at the Conference on Virtual Worlds for Children on 23 May 2008.

Put the correct words from the table below in the above article.

1.	(a)	suggests	(b)	suggest	(c)	suggestive	(d)	suggestion
2.	(a)	valuation	(b)	valuables	(c)	valuable	(d)	values
3.	(a)	other	(b)	others	(c)	another	(d)	otherwise
4.	(a)	liking	(b)	likely	(c)	likeness	(d)	like
5.	(a)	worthwhile	(b)	which	(c)	while	(d)	while away
6.	(a)	of	(b)	by	(c)	with	(d)	to
7.	(a)	them	(b)	these	(c)	there	(d)	it
8.	(a)	at	(b)	as	(c)	with	(d)	by
9.	(a)	for	(b)	on	(c)	by	(d)	at
10.	(a)	none	(b)	no	(c)	one	(d)	ones
11.	(a)	emphasize	(b)	emphasis	(c)	empty	(d)	emptiness
12.	(a)	foundations	(b)	founders	(c)	finds	(d)	findings

WRITING:

Write about *children being online* for 10 minutes. Correct your partner's paper.

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HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find out more about *Adventure Rock*. Share what you discover with your partner(s) in the next lesson.

3. VIRTUAL WORLDS: Make a poster about the virtual worlds that exist on the Internet. Show your work to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all have similar things?

4. CONCERNED PARENT: Write a magazine article about the good and bad things about kids entering virtual worlds. Include imaginary interviews with a six-year-old who loves being online and his concerned parents. Include questions about rehearsing real-life situations.

Read what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Write down any new words and expressions you hear from your partner(s).

5. LETTER: Write a letter to Professor David Gauntlett. Ask him three questions about his research and virtual worlds. Give him three pieces of advice on what he should tell games makers to keep children safe. Read your letter to your partner(s) in your next lesson. Your partner(s) will answer your questions.

6. DIARY / JOURNAL: You are a six-year-old. Write your diary entry about one day in your life online in your virtual world. Include your thoughts on the real world. Which is better? Read your entry to your classmates in the next lesson.

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

a. F   b. T   c. F   d. F   e. T   f. F   g. F   h. T

SYNONYM MATCH:

1.	virtual		a.	imitation
2	rehearse		b.	practice
3.	ventured		c.	journeyed
4.	indicated		d.	expressed
5.	consequences		e.	results
6.	carried out		f.	conducted
7.	avatars		g.	alias icons
8.	emphasis		h.	stress
9.	gimmicks		i.	tricks
10.	findings		j.	conclusions

PHRASE MATCH:

1.	children aged 6-12 can learn important		a.	social skills in virtual worlds
2	better for kids than passive pastimes		b.	like watching TV
3.	the children adopted		c.	different roles
4.	a safe place for children to		d.	rehearse real-life situations
5.	the negative or painful consequences		e.	of the real world
6.	children have to explore, create		f.	things and ask questions
7.	It is a closed		g.	world
8.	Kids can share tips and		h.	hints for other users
9.	The emphasis is		i.	on safety for kids
10.	advertising and sales		j.	gimmicks

GAP FILL:

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The BBC's research was carried out using its **own** Children's BBC online world called *Adventure Rock*. In it, children have to explore, **create** things and ask questions as they go deeper into the game. It is a closed world where children's avatars cannot **meet** or communicate. Kids can **share** tips and hints for other users on a message board, which is controlled and **edited** by BBC staff. There are none of the chat rooms or discussion boards normally found in virtual worlds like Second Life. The **emphasis** is on safety for kids in an online environment without advertising and sales **gimmicks**. Researchers also asked parents about their feelings towards their children spending time in *Adventure Rock*. The findings were **presented** at the Conference on Virtual Worlds for Children on 23 May 2008.

LANGUAGE WORK

1 - a   2 - c   3 - b   4 - d   5 - c   6 - a   7 - d   8 - b   9 - c   10 - a   11 - b   12 - d