Design principles for educational virtual environments
(as part of the CILTs design principles interactive poster session at AERA 2003)

Project Leaders
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Objectives
The "Building Blocks for Virtual Worlds" project aims to develop design principles for a starter kit for educational virtual worlds.

Perspectives, methods, and data sources
The project will synthesize lessons learned by the VLearn3D.org educational 3D multi-user virtual worlds community into a set of design principles, which can be shared within our community and with the broader community of educational technology developers via CILT. Specifically, we will inform the design of a "basic starter kit" for using the Activeworlds technology. Through surveys of the AWEDU and VLearn3D communities as well as related research groups, we will compile a list of critical features and new user issues. These will be presented at the annual online conference of VLearn3D.org for discussion and input. Final recommendations for the starter kit will be contributed to the CILT database and posted at VLearn3D.org. This information will serve as the basis for seeking support to develop a starter kit for AWEDU that will incorporate means for managing and evaluating user activities inworld in addition to a simple and flexible virtual architecture for user spaces.

Point of view in research
The key challenges educational communities face are not only technological but also sociological. Technology has to be ready to use by non-programmers that are interested to focus on learning content rather than implementation details. In addition, it will need to encourage and robustly support social interaction between two or more people online and facilitate the emergence of online communities. This project aims to identify design principles that support social interaction and community building principles as identified by Peter Kollock, Elinor Ostrom, Mike Godwin, Amy Jo Kim, Jenny Preece, and others.