DIY Virtual Education Environment:

One Teacher Education Department's Journey from Second Life to Open Simulator

Peter Blair
Brigham Young University - Idaho
United States
kyfa.blair@gmail.com

Lee Mason
University of Texas San Antonio
United States
Lee.Mason@utsa.edu

Matt Reeder
Utah State University
United States
matt.reeder@usu.edu

Simulations have been shown to be an effective method of introducing novice professionals to complicated and high-risk experiences (Ward, Williams, & Hancock, 2006). In simulations, the participants' behaviors mirror "real-world" actions, but the natural contingencies of those actions are removed. This scaffolding procedure allows trainees to gain the experience needed to succeed in real world applications while minimizing the potential risks. For the growing number of students in rural areas who receive their teacher training via distance education programs, the opportunity to simulate educational practices in a live, face-to-face context is absent. A multi-user virtual environment (MUVE), such as Second Life (Second Life; http://secondlife.com) or the Opensimulator 3D Application Server (OpenSim; http://opensimulator.org/), offers the ability to conduct such simulations with participants who are located in rural or remote areas and who are unable to engage in place-based activities. Specifically, simulations within a MUVE afford the psychological sense of presence, defined as

the feeling of being in a virtual environment while being physically situated in another location (Insko, 2003).

This presentation will describe the development, implementation, and evaluation of a virtual environment called TeacherSim. The specific objectives of this presentation will be to:

1. describe our initial experiences in SecondLife,
2. describe the reasons for our migration from SecondLife to ScienceSim,
3. describe the development of TeacherSim in Open Simulator,
4. demonstrate several distance education teacher training activities in TeacherSim,
5. present evaluation data from TeacherSim studies, e.g., Mason, Blair, Jeon, & Glomb (2010), and
6. engage presentation participants in a discussion of experiences with teacher training in virtual environments and lessons learned.

References

Insko, B. (2003). Measuring presence: Subjective, Behavioral and Physiological Methods. In G. Riva, F. Davide, W.A. Ijsselsteijn (Eds.) *Being There: Concepts, Effects and Measurement of User Presence in Synthetic Environments,* (pp. 110-118). Amsterdam: Ios Press.

Mason, L.L., Blair, P., Jeon, T.K., & Glomb, N. (2011). Virtual tutor training: Learning to teach in a multi-user virtual environment. *International Journal of Gaming and Computer-Mediated Simulation*, *3* (1), 51-67.

Ward, P., Williams, A.M., & Hancock, P.A. (2006). Simulation for performance and training. In: K.A. Ericsson, N. Charness, P.J. Feltovich, and R.R. Hoffman (Eds.) *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*. New York, Cambridge University Press.