

Virtual worlds best practice in education conference

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Just coming down from the Virtual Worlds Best Practice in Education conference. Held Friday, Saturday, Sunday Second Life time there was a great range of sessions, largely in traditional conference settings over several sims. What a helluva lot of planning and effort went into this. Even more impressive considering they had 16 weeks to pull it off.

I was so interested in the subject matter that I pulled an all-nighter over Sunday/Monday Australia time so that I could fit in sessions that I might have otherwise missed.

Unfortunately the conference itself didn't have a tag – I'm tagging this with VWBPE and will get to my bookmarks and Flickr photos soon I promise.

A personal pet peeve I have to mention despite the fact with a lowly BSci and one post grad course under my belt, I have fewer formal qualifications than the presenters: I really dislike the whole Digital Natives/Immigrants theory used in relation to age. Stop it.

Age is not the dividing line. There are children and teenagers for whom technology is NOT a ubiquitous part of their lives. There are others who use different tech than what you might think or provide (they use mobiles, you're introducing them to Second Life thinking they MUST be gamers). Plus, you're giving people who need to get off their butts (but it's too hard, but I'm not tech savvy) an easy out – **but I'm an IMMIGRANT.**

Pedagogical Design of Learning Experiences Within Virtual Worlds

Pedagogy	Second Life
Active collaboration	Collaborative learning
Active engagement	Immersion
Interaction with environment	Construction of environment
Publishing knowledge	Construction of objects
Transfer of knowledge	Persistent
Adaptive	Flexibility

Carina Girvan, a post graduate student and Tim Savage, lecturer in the Center for IT at Trinity College University of Dublin Ireland.

Provided a look at the model of best practice for the design of learning in virtual worlds upon which they are working.

If you decide to use a virtual world, they counsel that you first look at the features/benefits of that environment and allow that to feed into the appropriate teaching methodology for the learning outcomes you want to deliver. Once you've hit on the pedagogy, then you build, implement and then evaluate BOTH the effectiveness of the implementation AND the teaching methodology used. It's not always the fault of the tool or the way it's implemented or the teaching methodology alone.

Carina did an excellent job of illustrating how to analyse

how well mapped pedagogy is to what the environment has to offer and I offer you the screen shot here:

Business use of Virtual worlds

Last night – or this morning at 2am or so was a stellar session on the business use of virtual worlds.

Reps from Sun Microsystem were on hand to share what is going on in their localised virtual world platform Wonderland.

Wonderland has ability to work on docs, browse web sites together, dial-in via phone and they are currently trying to create things that can be used across platforms.

Sun and Xerox have written policies regarding how their employees dress and behave in their virtual world. Sun has a human only policy for instance and prefers that employees use Sun avatars for company activities.

IBM says their employees are welcome to come to meetings as fish. I rather like that.

The Sun people use virtual worlds for in-house conferences, for virtual teams to meet and gather, for team building activities and to model problems and solutions. For instance, check out this link to a blog post about a 3D virtualised model of their datacentre in Santa Clara to help analysts understand the need for datacenter consolidation and how a Sun innovation will help the newly consolidated datacenter run more efficiently.

http://blogs.sun.com/vw/entry/is_that_sun_s_santa

EdTech Island – 2 years later

Dr. Lisa Dawley, <http://onlineeducators.blogspot.com/> from the Department of Educational Technology at Boise State University delivered what was one of my favourite sessions on how she's built up EdTech Island <http://edtechisland.wetpaint.com/>

Started two years go – today the island has generated \$US130k in tuition dollars from eight post graduate courses run purely online. I don't know profit/ROI but I can say that as at this writing, Educational and Not for profit pricing runs \$700 for initial set up and then \$147.50 per month for the highest performing type of private region. <http://secondlife.com/land/privatepricing.php> Of course there are other costs involved – salary for a moderator/island goddess, money for developers/coders. But then back-out costs for face to face delivery. I'll leave you to do the math, I'm operating on 3 hours sleep!

The island has a 1200-member Group that receives regular in-world notices and also provides free “living” space to 50 educators on a rolling basis. These educators are encouraged to and do give back to the island by mentoring new students, scripting, building, leading informal learning sessions, etc.

There is also a free Sandbox area where anyone can come in and build. This can open one up to griefers (mean-spirited people who try to throw a wrench in the works for users), but Lisa rightly

says it is worth the risk and maintenance to provide as open an experience as possible. As a result, the island attracts builders and scripters who can and do contribute by way of saying thank you.

She tied in social networking very nicely – talking about persistent social networking. She has done a webinar https://admin.na3.acrobat.com/_a768376479/p17101188/ that covers this more in depth that I plan on treating my ears and eyes to in the very near future.

I don't want this post to be any more War and Peace than it already is – so here are my notes from the session today:

Persistence in virtual worlds

World continues to develop and change whether or not subscriber logged on Gehorsma 2003

What remains when the games is turned off and on

Active and available 24/7 (according to Wikipedia)

Spaces in which artefacts of others help guide new learners and where users are free to interact where and how they please Jones and Bronack <http://cv.bronack.net/aetzone.html>

- 1) Physical design – design to meet needs for building, living, sharing information, attending events, socialising, experiential learning
 - Use nodes and pathways to promote persistence Christian (?) Nodes represent where info lies, pathways could be sidewalks, paths between nodes – got interested in using the pathway themselves. Got interested in how and why people went to certain nodes on the island. She put up tutorials along the path to guide them – it did have an impact. Use pathways, nodes, signage – Group notices support persistence in a HUGE way – numbers went up 10-fold!
 - Maya Realities Heatmap <http://www.mayarealities.com/>
 - Offer living spaces to community members - Offer free services to the public – sandbox
 - Knowing who and when people are participating – for timing of events and keywords – can get info on nationalities

2) Social networking and communications

In-world Social Networks – can be leveraged to support teaching. Chimera Cosmos (an SL friend) says very important for newbies. More like RL than people realise. Takes time and work to build community in SL. Formal and informal events important to build community and relationships.

Teaching people how to build is very important. When you have a 3D space constructed by users and demonstrate knowledge in 3D – it empowers learners to teach them how to build.

Out of world networks

List serv for SL builders

SLOOG HUD – then when on the web you can find locations in world.

[Http://sloog.org](http://sloog.org)

Social Network Knowledge Construction

Go through the 5 stages where people start off just finding out about networks and could end up being leaders or just more advanced in certain stages. Base the activities/pedagogical framework

on how experienced learners are with virtual worlds.

A big part of this that feeds into persistence/sustainability is people building learning artefacts and leaving them for the next “generation” of learners.

3) Community Ownership – What would Google Do? Who owns the network?

Allow community members to contribute – in fact, recruit and encourage leaders. Provide free facilities when and where you can to attract people to your space.

4) Partner with professional associations/organisations

Bring people together around common interests, just as in the real world can form consortiums

5) Include Gaming elements – play

Don't be afraid to have fun – build in celebrations, allow whimsy and cheekiness and build in activities that will connect learners with each other.

NonPlayerCharacters – Emilia EdTech. Auto bot- with pre-scripted messages.

XD Fusion sells bots.

Mascots – has a created character and he shares on Twitter. Don't want it to be associated with her – don't want it to be a person necessarily. Removing identity to provide service – does that help?

Media Literacy - Immersive Education – Ways of knowing and being

This was a three-speaker, facilitated discussion and wow it brought out passion and excitement in the audience. The backchannel was lively and the front of house was insightful.

I unfortunately missed the first panelist's presentation – Elizabeth Thoman of the Center for Media Literacy in the US <http://www.medialit.org/>

A presentation prior had overlapped and I got stuck under the ISTE coliseum a few times (as you tend to do when there is lag and the floors haven't rezzed up properly). ;)

By the way – great tool here to help learners evaluate web sites - http://21cif.com/tools/evaluate/evalWizard_beta_1.1.html

I managed to grab a seat just as Elizabeth was finishing on:

The revolution that technology is bringing is that teachers need to change their pedagogy and assessment.

When I build, am I just building pretty spaces – or is it about engaging students?

When you look at the environment – you look at what you want to build and what are the learning outcomes. What do you want them to learn and know when they leave? What will they interact with?

Work, learn and play.

Labelle's work – I don't know which Labelle – I'm assuming it's not Patti or the Labelle who wrote

so much about limb dominance. Will have to find her paper.

Then Activity theory – notion of creation and imagination – missed the citation

Next up was Marlene Brooks of Memorial University who talked about setting learning outcomes at the start of a build so that you can evaluate its success, what's working, what needs to be tweaked/changed.

Learning Outcomes/Objectives

- Decrease challenging, complex and/or difficult concepts
- Demonstrate processes, procedures and or competencies
- Increase engagement with content
- Increase interaction between teachers and learners and between students
- Provide role model examples
- Integrate or apply theory to practice through reflective activities
- Accommodate a variety of learning styles
- Promote active learning and problem solving

The notion of critique can be misunderstood – we have an over determination of we value and transmit knowledge in traditional and constructivist pedagogy.

In traditional education, knowledge is structured and transmitted. An emphasis on students restating information. Learning is passive. Promotes individualism/isolation and competition as the goal is to do well on tests.

In constructivism, knowledge is co-constructed and learners engage in the construction of knowledge with an emphasis on critique (although she seriously questions if constructive criticism is fully understood). Promotes connection to others to solve problems.

In immersive teaching – knowledge is discovered and EXPERIENCED. Emphasis is on creativity and learning is immersive. Promotes engagement and connections with others, transformational learning of self and other.

We need to think about our assessment frameworks in the traditional, constructivist and now immersive streams.

<http://www.distance.mun.ca/media/files/secondlife/engi.php>

Luyen Chou of School Net whose introduction took several minutes (and he goodnaturedly joined all of us in our giggling) <http://www.schoolnet.com/luyen> summed up what the others had talked about and the entire audience jumped in enthusiastically.

He is a long-time constructivist progressive education in K-12, especially using new media and technologies – he agrees we need to look at assessment. Too much of constructivist progressive education is too dependent on the facilitator – authentic assessment needs to be developed and turn those assessments into actionable data.

He is excited about immersive transition because in immersive environment dealing with 100% data saturated environment modelling atomic activity. Usually assessment is the other way around.

The importance of both the broadcast model of media literacy and the creative – constructive and deconstructive – very much interconnected. Take the notion of deconstructive literacy – go to Google and search on Martin Luther King, Jr.

The 4th result is something called martinlutherkingjr.org maintained and run by white supremacists, without tools to understand where those particular producers of content are coming from and how to interpret how Google does it and realise that it isn't just based on accuracy you'd be fooled into believing you were looking at a site with a balance opinion on the civil rights movement.

WE don't live in a world where streams of info are compartmentalised into different media – as we move into a digitally saturated environment – Americans on computer 8.5 hours per day, he argues as immersive as what we're doing right now (interacting in SL)– we're talking information and data literacy – how do we interpret the streams of info coming into our desktops?

In an immersive world where all of our activities translated into digital data – how do we assess that?

Some lamented the session end and begged for ways to continue the conversations started about the literacies needed for the future.

I pointed people to the excellent research my colleagues Pru and Belinda did in 2008 for an edna workshops presentation on the topic:

<http://www.edna.edu.au/edna/go/events/workshops/cache/offonce/pid/2189#goto-5000>

What skills do I really need to teach? Developing Training Curriculum for virtual instructors

Catherine Dutton, Instructional Coordinator, Instructional Support Services, Texas Woman's University

This was a fantastic session that covered a topic near and dear to my heart – how to arm educators with the skills they need to get started in virtual worlds.

Catherine shared what she learned from a course she helped to develop for her university.

Developed October 2007 – Last session completed November 2008

14 hour course focusing on teaching in SL

13 sessions over the year

115 participants

74 graduates

Goal was to prepare SL residents who may or may not have formal teaching experience to teach in a virtual world.

Co-teachers

Coaches

Focus on learning – NO GRADES.

No voice – all classes delivered using text chat because people said they needed time to process and learning and text allowed them that (you can copy and paste text out of SL chat). This worked well as it eliminated the extra layer of what can go wrong technically (no audio woes to deal with).

ME: Personally, I think this detracts from the immersive quality of a virtual world and could have been of benefit to the educators in giving them experience in troubleshooting.

Made assumptions about students...

Thought that all would have basic grasp of SL skills, could rez a prim and move it around, thought all wanted to teach and were new to teaching

Content of the course

- Resources for Educators
- Andragogy
- IP/Copyright
- Mechanical details
- Teaching a mini-class
- Voice or Text
- Troubleshooting issues
- Class management

Wanted to introduce teachers to the rich resources in SL and encouraged them to use resources existent rather than re-make them.

Andragogy – the theory of working with adult learners. Malcom Knowles. Their last experience may have been years ago in HS or college. Adults are self-directed, want to learn, not going to a SL skills class.

IP/Copyright – directed all the students to ask for permission before giving things away. Setting SL permissions.

Get the full syllabus here: http://docs.google.com/View?docID=dd9n7gsn_81c9qfn3hs

Lessons learned

- Lectures=boring (the irony of this was not lost on her as she stood and presented)
- Find ways to mix it up – force avatars to move
- Competition/awards graduation – a MUST
- Application based learning worked well
- First life can and does interfere – be flexible
- Second Life CAN and WILL crash

A really good audience question - how many hours does it take for teachers to be effective?

14 hour class – then partnered them with a mentor for first 6 classes. Most effective after the course finished.

How to write out a lesson plan was a big struggle for people – gave them coaches to help them develop. Even for experienced educators.

After this session a group of us retired back to my plot for a bit of deconstruction and a catch-up before going back for the conference close.

KerryJ - KerryJ's Neotenous Tech <http://kerryj.com>
Notes on the Virtual Worlds – Best Practice in Education conference
27-29 March 2009

There was so much hard work that went into this conference and it ran so smoothly – well done guys!

I understand that many of the presentations will be put up online, unfortunately there is not an official conference tag. :(I am using VWBPE.