



The Project:

By: Greg De Luca

How can a mask, costume, or in other words – an online avatar, leverage our ability to immerse students in authentic job-related environments? How can “masking” their identity and immersing them in a virtual world provide them with rich and relevant practice before they acquire real-world employment? How can the use of a 3D virtual environment more realistically mirror the real-life occupational demands of special care counselors, real-estate brokers or network technicians in ways that a classroom simply can’t? How can we implement lab environments for students within programs at Champlain’s Continuing Education department that would allow them to virtually practice in an authentic way, without the contrivance of in-class role-plays and case studies? How can this environment then be modified to answer the real-life occupational demands of graduates from our programs? A possible answer: Second Life.

The Goals:

- 1) To build a fluid virtual learning environment in order to come one step closer to the “real” working conditions that students will encounter in a “real-world” work environment., 2) to briefly study the effect of the virtual learning environment on student motivation and immersion, and 3) to provide the following learning outcomes and tools that would not be possible in a face-to-face setting:
 - 1) Deeper authentic immersion in the target work environment
 - 2) Deeper authentic immersion in the target professional role (doffing the “student mask” and donning the “counsellor mask” in the form of a 3D avatar – a double-blind)
 - 3) Asynchronous lab environment used for mandatory and optional assignments
 - 4) Immersive practice space for students, open 24/7
 - 5) A low-cost Course Management System (CMS) that can effectively replace Moodle, D2L, etc.
 - 6) An experimental lab for teachers and a platform for blended and distance courses
 - 7) The first, non-physically invasive and authentic Deweyan “Experiential Alternate Learning Environment” (ALE) available for any of our programs at Champlain.

Visit the online campus on:

www.SecondLife.com

Region: Bassett

Coordinates: X:220, Y:120, Z:57

The Study:

Using a modified version of the Situational Intrinsic Motivation Scale (Guay, et al, 2000), a 7-point Likert scale survey (see below), volunteer participants (convenience sample) were polled after having run an exercise in the SecondLife simulation. The brief survey aimed to measure participants’ intrinsic motivation (IMOT), internal and external regulation (IREG/EREG) as well as their a-motivation or lack thereof (AMOT) and relate these to interest and comfort in using technology.

SIMS and Immersion

Second Life in Special Care Counselling

Directions:

Read each item carefully. Using the scale below, please circle the number that best describes the reason why you are currently engaged in this activity. Answer each item according to the following scale: 1: corresponds not at all; 2: corresponds a very little; 3: corresponds a little; 4: corresponds moderately; 5: corresponds enough; 6: corresponds a lot; 7: corresponds exactly.

Motivation:

Why are you currently engaged in this activity?

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| 1. Because I think that this activity is interesting | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 2. Because I am doing it for my own good | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 3. Because I am supposed to do it | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 4. There may be good reasons to do this activity, but I don't see any. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 5. Because I think that this activity is pleasant | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 6. Because I think that this activity is good for me | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 7. Because it is something that I have to do | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 8. I do this activity but I am not sure if it is worth it | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 9. Because this activity is fun | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 10. By personal decision | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 11. Because I don't have any choice | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 12. I don't know; I don't see what this activity brings me | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 13. Because I feel good when doing this activity | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 14. Because I believe that this activity is important for me | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 15. Because I feel that I have to do it | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 16. I do this activity, but I am not sure it is a good thing to pursue it | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |

Immersion:

- | | |
|--|---------------|
| 17. This activity helped me feel like a real special care counsellor. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 18. This role-play was more “real” than working with a partner in class. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 19. The 3D counselling office is a better simulation than face-to-face role-plays. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 20. Using the technology made it more difficult to learn and practice. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 21. I am very comfortable using technology like computers and the internet. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |

Codification key: Questions 1, 5, 9, 13 Intrinsic Motivation (IMOT)

Questions 2, 6, 10, 14 Internal Regulation (IREG)

Questions 3, 7, 11, 15 External Regulation (EREG)

Questions 4, 8, 12, 16 A-motivation (AMOT)

Questions 17/18 Immersion, 20/21 Technological Comfort

Methodology:

Once the SecondLife platform was built, the instructor of the course drafted a case-study (herein omitted). Normally, students read the case-study, plan an intervention and role-play it in front of the instructor. Thereafter, the instructor assigns them a grade. In this case, participating students were asked to read the case-study, plan their intervention, but role-play it on SecondLife. An audio recording of their exchange was taken using Audacity. Students were also provided with an evaluation rubric (herein omitted) to be used in an auto-evaluation of their performance. Auto-evaluations were then peer reviewed and approved by the instructor. For the purpose of this tool build/study, a brief survey was given to participants at the close of their online role-play. Participants sat at different workstations, far way from each other. They logged into SecondLife and went ahead with their intervention. The specific instructions to students are detailed below.

Instructions:

- 1) With your partner, read the case-study scenario. Then, together, use the provided questions to consider the clients’ state of change. Decide who will role-play the client and who will role-play the counsellor. Together, plan the intervention.
- 2) Before doing the role-play, take a look at the evaluation rubric. You will be responsible for assigning a grade to your team. The grade is not for the student who “role-plays” the counsellor, but for your team.
- 3) Decide who is best-suited to role-play the counsellor and who is best for the client. Log into SecondLife and run the intervention. The “client” should stick to script and try to become the “client” as best as possible and the counsellor should follow the intervention plan that you have prepared together.
- 4) Your SecondLife interview session will last a maximum of 20 minutes. It will be recorded and a copy of the recording will be made available to you.
- 5) Once finished, please take a few minutes to respond to the attached questionnaire.
- 6) Once you have received the audio recording of your SecondLife intervention, take the time to review it, using the grading rubric, and assign yourself a grade. For each criterion on the rubric, make sure to write an explanatory paragraph as to why your team deserves that grade. When finished, you should have four (4) paragraphs (1 for each criterion), detailing why you deserve that grade (based on the rubric definitions).
- 7) Submit your evaluation, with arguments based on the rubric to your teacher for final review, by the 19th of May, 2015.

Results:

As shown below, participants’ motivation was directly tied to their interest in using technology in education and in general. Thus, as students become more and more tech savvy, the use of 3D virtual environments can also engender motivation. Results for immersion were also positive, though somewhat less so, and again seem to be correlated to comfort with technology. Two participants mentioned how the activity was “fun” but somewhat difficult to “set up” and lacking in “body language”. Though SecondLife does provide a “gestures” function, participants found it difficult to use and read, thus detracting from the counselling experience in terms of unspoken communication.

