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# Animation Overrides, Prims And Student Teaching: Managing And Collaborating With Undergraduate Teacher Candidates In Multi-User Virtual Environments

Randall S. Dunn



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# Animation Overrides, Prims And Student Teaching: Managing And Collaborating With Undergraduate Teacher Candidates In Multi-User Virtual Environments

Randall Dunn, Liberty University, USA

## INTRODUCTION

The mid-two thousands hinged the future of education on the use of multi-user virtual environments. The frenzy over this clumsy but multimedia rich environment ran viral. Assumptions about the nature of the “traditional” college student (late teens to early twenties) fed into the thought that we merely had to virtually build it for the students to come (and be engaged, motivated, and potentially learn). Now, we see the rise of mobile technologies, augmented reality and collaborative online social networks as replacements for this “old technology.” Where does that leave these virtual playgrounds for the socialites and potentially the learners?

In 2008, researchers at Liberty University identified a gap in the research literature with regard to these technologies and their uses as learning environments seeing MUVES as an opportunity to examine the effectiveness of these environments as tools for connecting with students learning at a distance (moving beyond the trend of evaluating the individual experience and identity formation in these worlds and looking at actual learning community formation). Liberty University’s distance learning program has seen exponential growth in the last five years, so the examination of this technology is both a worthwhile scholarly pursuit as well as a rather practical one for this rapidly growing university seeking to effectively engage students through their studies.

Recent empirical work has shed light on some potential benefits of MUVES for learning; as learning simulations for pre-service teachers (Mahon, et al 2010), for art education (Lu, 2010), teaching finance (Thornick & Hornburg, 2010), learning about urban planning (Thomas & Hollander, 2010) and health education (Tao, Lim & Watkins, 2010). One of the shifts seems to be focusing less on outcomes and more on the process and experience students enjoy as part of learning at a distance in MUVES (Dass, Dabbagh & Clark, 2011). How do the students work through issues (think constructivist activities, focusing on collaboration skills). While Second Life’s use is primarily relegated to the higher education level, some discussion of benefit has appeared in K-12 learning environments as well (Inman, Wright & Hartman, 2010; Mallan, et al, 2010). In short, this environment’s uses has evolved in thought of use as much as the actual technology itself.

## THE PROJECT

Liberty University’s School of Education offers multiple online undergraduate and graduate programs, providing students opportunities to return to school to enter the education profession. Students from all over the world join in on on-line learning courses, interacting with students, faculty and content through 8 and 16 week courses. Additionally, some residential students apply to return home for the final semester, student teaching, for various reasons. This last semester for our licensure-seeking students provides an interesting challenge. Residential students suddenly break free from the “face-to-face” support of on-campus experiences to being away from this rather challenging final step in the program.

Faculty and staff began examining different models for maintaining connections with these students. One such method was the use of MUVE technologies to provide synchronous communication experiences for students in the program. Over the period of five semesters, students have logged in and “sat” in virtual “classrooms” to hear speakers, work on small group projects, interact with faculty, interact with each other, and work through real student

teaching issues in the areas of classroom management. The experience was meant to mimic (or provide at least a general equivalency with) the face-to-face counterpart taking place on the residential campus.

The students participating in this project worked exclusively with online technologies for communication, primarily the MUVE Second Life, but also using YouTube posted video tutorials and supplemental videos, email communication and even the use of document collaborative spaces. The project established a reasonably protected space to provide privacy. Simple furnishings and non-distracting environments were generally employed, however some alternative environments were created and occasionally explored (with seemingly little impact).

## **INTENT OF PRESENTATION**

This presentation will look briefly at the empirically derived lessons learned from this MUVE-based student teaching project, examining the issues related to managing the project, the students in the project and the challenges faced. The lessons learned here will focus on student feedback, faculty perceptions, reflective observations, use of survey tools examining motivation, engagement, perceived learning, technology competency and the formation of learning communities (specifically the community of inquiry framework). These results will be reported and discussed as we continue to explore this particular implementation of a MUVE based seminar learning environment.

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