

A GAME WORLD AS A CLASSROOM

Teaching with Technology Essay

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Abstract: Online classes seem to be suffering from a stale interface. Online classes deal with stagnant websites and boring chat rooms. By bringing an online class into an online video game, the class could become more interactive and help users develop a sense of identity that would otherwise be impossible. Furthermore, the interface would allow for streamlining of chat channels and the environment would be aesthetically pleasing and could help foster learning in new and creative ways.

*Teaching with Technology Essay***ED 5700****Name: Daniel Valentin****Instructor: Dr. Ludmilla Smirnova****TwT Essay Title: A Game World as a Classroom**

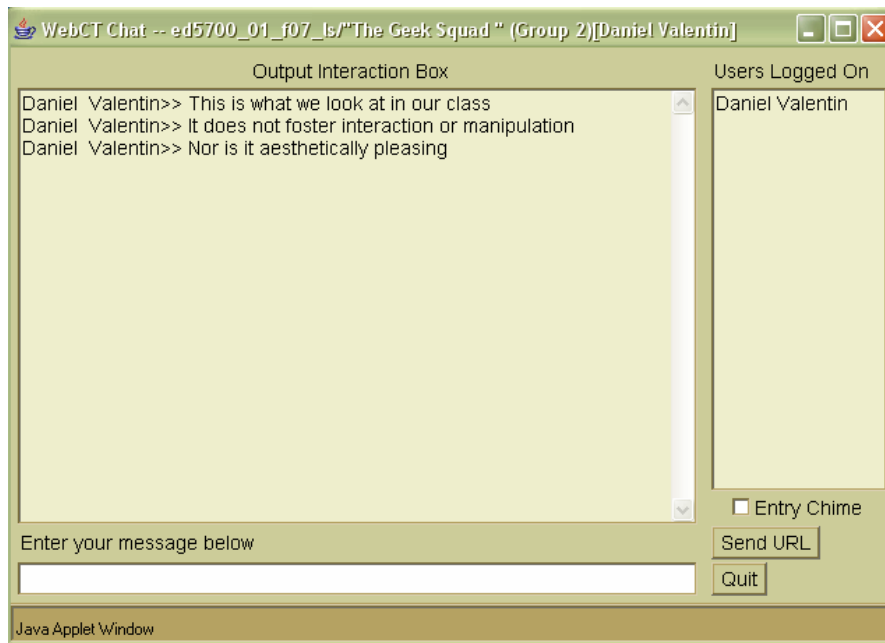
#	Criteria	Points	Self-Evaluation
1.	Rationale/Coherence: - Problem addressed (what?) - Reasons for the choice of the topic (why?) Reflective Essay Title Structure: Introduction. A description of critical need, supported with evidence. Summary of the new research in this area. Body: Characteristics of the issue; presentation of options and solutions. Examples, illustrations from the field and personal experience if possible. Implications for district/ school/ classroom practice. Conclusion. General outcomes of the research findings. Personal learning outcomes from completing this project.	10	The problem kind of evolved as I wrote the essay. I knew what I was trying to say, but addressing it proved to be complicated. Nevertheless, the idea became more present as I did more writing (which you can see clearly due to the sheer size of this undertaking). The issue is present, but it really evolved as it was written. It's an interesting idea that, while not always practical, is certainly novel in theory.
2.	Awareness of Broader Educational Issues. Awareness of Implications.	2	This was the hardest part and the implications were never completely known, but they were attempted to be fully made aware of, this could have been a whole new paper.
3.	Application of the ideas for district/school/ classroom. -Reality, Necessity, Validity, -Reliability of the Project ideas.	3	Applications and validity is explained. I think this is where you can see some of the faults of the idea come about.
4.	Format/ Mechanics: An Acceptable APA format, writing style appropriate to the content, with correct grammar, spelling and punctuation.	5	APA and grammar was thoroughly checked.
5.	Comments		This was a fun paper to write, but was not easy to explain, hence the length. Interesting experience.

Many have dismissed video games as a poor source of technology. This is completely understandable in many ways. Many have demoted video games to the status of mindless entertainment. I could easily list the thousands of positive ways video games can influence student learning. I will list some of them as many are not aware of them, however one could use technology to hold a class outside of school. Why use WebCT when no one can see who is talking? This does not parallel real life nor does it help form an identity. However using a video game to host a class could easily fix those problems. Many have been using Second Life to do just this; however Second Life suffers from poor servers and a horrible looking environment. Why not use a video game to hold a class where people can see each other and have the environment being aesthetically pleasing.

Some positives to this idea are games are interactive and problem solving oriented, video games are customizable, they focus on a variety of subjects, they help form identity and they have an excellent use of manipulation and have a variety ways to distribute knowledge. This can also help develop perception and action. Cognitive research suggests that for humans, perception and action are deeply connected. “For example, when a person is changing the eco system or water a garden – this causes humans to feel as if their bodies and minds have stretched into a new space” (Clark, 2003, 7).

If one takes the game World of Warcraft, the biggest online video game of all time, one could easily do many of these interactions and form a sense of community. This is something that is incredibly hard to do with WebCT where our classes tend to look like a wall of text (see figure 1.0)

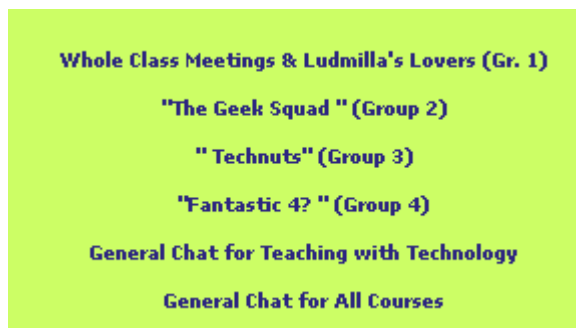
Figure 1.0



Furthermore you
have to have
multiple chat
rooms and you
have to leave and
enter multiple chat
rooms (1.1). It's
not easy and

complicated for everyone involved.

Figure 1.1



Why should everyone have to
leave their chat room to enter another chat
room? The streamlining of World of
Warcraft chat could ease this issue. Every
group could have their own chat room,

still be in class chat and send private messages all on one easy to see screen (Figure 1.2)

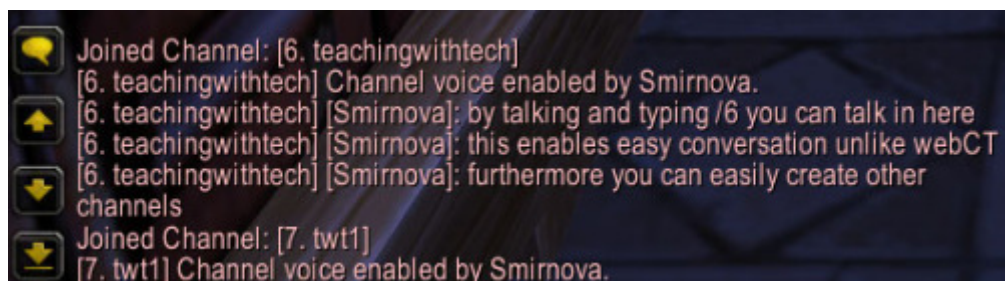


Figure 1.2

Furthermore, people can develop great identity based on personal interest; people could be tailors, cooks, blacksmiths, fisherman, people of great intellect or people of great forceful power. Certainly it would be options, but not necessities. If people decided to actually play the game then this could also foster learning because of the games natural creative aspects. The game allows for so



Figure 1.3

much human creativity. “Given human creativity, problems learners face early on would allow for connection and distribution of parallel processing in cognitive science” (Rice, 2007, pp.99).

The game also supports several voice chat programs. Why deal with the frustration of always typing? With the simple accessibility of a cheap microphone, users could talk to each other and have private chat rooms etc. (figure 1.3)

This is not necessarily about changing an entire course, but rather streamlining and fostering already available technology. Is it entirely cheap? Not entirely. Would it be more expensive than the average cost of text books per classes (\$75-100)? More than likely not. In fact, setting up a server and game account and buying a microphone would probably cost no more than \$40. If the technology is available, why continue to avoid it? Second Life is doing this, but Second Life has several problems include major server instability, a poor community and hard to run on nearly everyone’s computer. World of

Warcraft does not suffer from these problems. It's easy to run and with updated features it can only become more accessible to the user. In fact, World of Warcraft comes from a genre of games that incorporates the use of smart tools.

This question is asked by John Rice in the Journal of Technology Education, "What allows a learner to feel that his or her body and mind have extended into the world being studied or investigated into the world of biology and physics? Part of what does this is "smart tools" that is tools and technologies that allow the learner to manipulate that world in a fine-grained way" (Rice, 2007, pp. 94). Furthermore, World of Warcraft promotes an intellectual storyline that references famous movies, television and literature ranging from Lord of the Rings, The Heart of Darkness, Land of the Lost, Cold Mountain, The Hours and even Fraggle Rock. While the storyline is completely optional to follow, its depth is nearly unparalleled. "Storyline is related to narrative, which is a key component of advanced games and simulations. When users immerse themselves in a story line, opportunities for increased thought and narrative processing will take place. Narrative study has been extended successfully to gaming environments and is considered a key means of understanding interactions with complex games" (Ryan, 2003, 95).

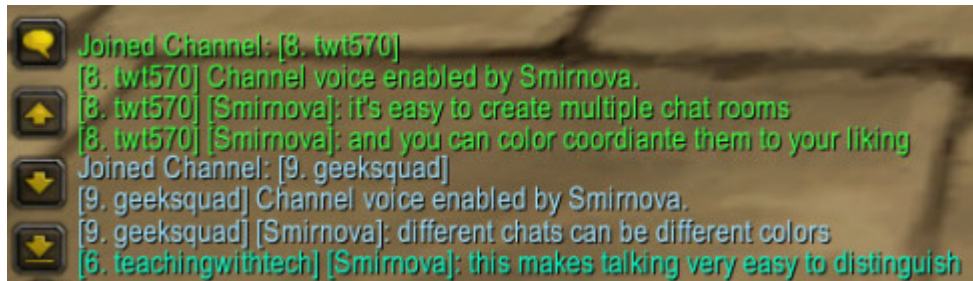
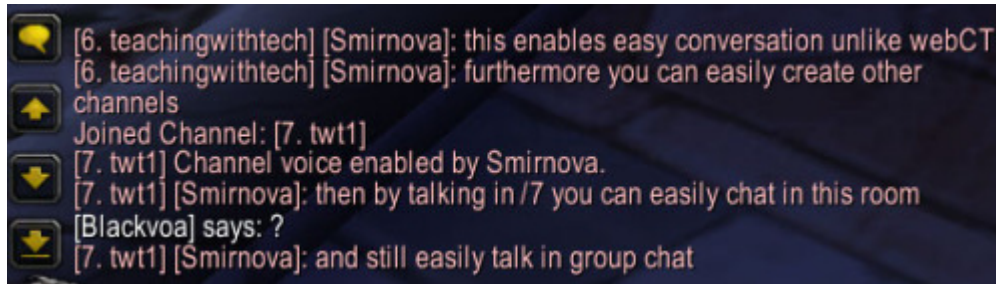
The idea is simple, apply a game (World of Warcraft) and implement it into an online course. This may be one of the few ways for technology to overcome the idea that it is necessary for a teacher to be in front of the classroom. By moving every part of the classroom into a game world and having an interactive game world be part of the classroom, the class is in tact and in the comfort of your own home. While there are more

complicated parts to this that would warrant a far more lengthy explanation, the ideas are there and are completely practical.

Furthermore, World of Warcraft also allows learners to adjust the difficulty to a personal preference, something that is completely unique to World of Warcraft.

“Motivation for humans lies in challenges that feel challenging, but doable and in gaining continual feedback that lets them know what progress they are making. Learners should be able to adjust the difficulty level while being encouraged to stay at the outer edge of, but inside their level of competence” (Gee, 2003, 27).

World of Warcraft’s success is only one reason it would be far better than a program like Second Life. World of Warcraft is one of the highest grossing mediums ever created. Revenues since the game began have been reported to be nearing six billion dollars (PCGamer). At any given time there are nearly 500,000 players on World of Warcraft. The magnitude and the community can warrant an excellent learning environment. Outside of the game aspects, just taken as an aesthetically pleasing chat room, World of Warcraft surpasses programs like Second Life and allows for an infinitely customizable classroom experience. Furthermore, built in chat rooms and voice chat programs allow for World of Warcraft to be an excellent choice outside of a formal program like WebCT or blackboard. Using an in-depth wiki and World of Warcraft side by side would be all that really needs to be set up for an online class. Taken at face value, video games are not in-depth enough to warrant learning. However, seeing all the utilities that are available, using video games makes perfect sense. Why deal with hard to build servers when so many servers and chat programs are available. Here are some pictures included to get an idea of what the game world and the chat system would look like.



You can also see it says the name of the person talking so there is no confusion, it also explains which chat channel the person is talking in (TWT570) or (GeekSquad) etc.

As for establishing identity, you can create characters as little or as much to your persona as you'd like. Here is Dr. S and some other people. Some general, others more exaggerated. General appearance:



Exaggerated characters:



Rather than staring at the screen you could easily be standing next to someone and having a conversation. This helps establish identity and a persona.

Finally, you could literally have class in hundreds of different locals. Here Dr. Smirnova is sitting on a bench in a church.



And here Dr. S is at a local tavern with a new found friend.



Why have class at a boring green screen when you can have class in a garden in a castle.



Dr. S loves the idea so much she's dancing on a table!



So the question would be is why is there a need for this technology in class? It is not necessarily a need, but it certainly would be all encompassing. By creating an interactive teaching environment a class could be much more than just staring at a boring screen. To go from webCT or blackboard or moogles to Chat room with character models and excellent chat services is huge. By focusing on video games to make a classroom more interactive could have huge implications. People say you can not replicate a teaching environment in a virtual world, but this would be a logical step in the process if we were trying to achieve just that.

There is some validity behind this, but it seems so foreign that it could be getting people to believe in the idea would be the hardest part. Implementing it is pretty much a non-issue, but getting people to believe in it is a completely different story. This could work, it is getting people to work with the idea that is hard. Setting it up and teaching people how to use Warcraft as a utility would ultimately be one of the easiest steps. The only other problem would be the culture of Warcraft, which could be interesting, but possibly exceedingly complicated.

If you have an environment set up as a game world and you have literally millions of people walking around, there are bound to be societal norms in-game that could be confusing. It is the equivalent to teenagers text messaging, “how r u? wuts ^? Call me l8r after skoo. Ttyl.” If you enter Warcraft without knowing what “LV 70 Resto Dru LF Heroic BM” means it could be confusing. Granted, this could be taken as a way to teach cultural norms, but if you really just want to teach a class about technology then societal norms may seem complicated. What could be an answer to this is letting the class explore the world on their own. Furthermore, teachers may play a more active role. “Teachers are

an important part of this cultural infrastructure, but through new roles. Teachers may emerge as a floating helper, dealing with technical problems and concept explanations, and guiding learners on doing tasks, an active role also defined as scaffolding” (Tuzun, 2007, 475).

As mentioned, the implications from using a gaming environment to hold a class can be huge. The beneficial properties of such an idea could be large, but it has never truly been done before. Second Life is a step in this direction, but by taking the step even further, technology could become a forefront for new teaching methodologies. No true study has been done on this, rather the support from the technology world could allow for something this ambitious come to fruition. Time will tell if a game as massive as World of Warcraft could hold a class and keep the attention of 25 or more students. But unless it is attempted, no one will truly know the implications that this would have.

Clark, Michael. (2003) Video Games: The New Interactive Medium, Learning by Design. pp. 4-22.

Gee, Paul. (2003) Good Video Games as Learning Machines, Learning by Design. pp. 1-31

Rice, John. (2007) Assessing Higher Order of Thinking in Video Games, Journal of Technology Education. pp. 87-100.

Tuzun, Hakan. (2007) Blending video games with learning: Issues and challenges with Classroom implementations, British Journal of Educational Technology. Pp 465-477