Austin Tate :: Austin Tate's IDEL11 Course Presentation

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IDEL11 - Austin Tate's Presentation

IDEL11 - Austin Tate's Presentation

I began the IDEL11 course and my involvement with the MSc in e-Learning by using the discussion forums, blogs and WallWisher walls to introduce myself to tutors and classmates. I was inspired by the WallWisher wall concept to create a personal Life Wall at http://atate.org to bring much of the material together. Much of the introductory content I chose was about collaborative projects or communities I have been involved in as that appeals to me.

Themes that ran throughout the course include the following:

- Introducing Myself - "Life Wall" - experiments in using tags and clippings related to myself... and inspired by the introductions and WallWisher boards used on MSc in e-Learning courses.
- Collaborative Art and Media
- Educational Technology Experiments - Moodle, SLoodle, Intelligent Classrooms, etc.
- Explorations of VLEs and PLEs
- Avatar Identity in Virtual Worlds - Immersive "Other Worlds" for training and fun
- Virtual Worlds for Collaboration - especially involvement with the open source communities engaged in these areas.
- Distributed Collaboration and Tool Support - e.g. Wikis, Sync and Async Requirements
- Wider Engagement

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Introduction and My Interests

Introduction and My Interests

In the first section I introduce myself, my virtual worlds avatar and on-line personality "Ai Austin", and give links to more information about me and my work and interests:

- http://www.aiai.ed.ac.uk/~bat/
- http://www.aiai.ed.ac.uk/~ai/

I began the IDEL11 course and my involvement with the MSc in e-Learning by using the discussion forums, blogs and WallWisher walls to introduce myself to tutors and classmates. I was inspired by the WallWisher wall concept to create a personal Life Wall at http://atate.org to bring much of the material together. Much of the introductory content I chose was about collaborative projects or communities I have been involved in as that appeals to me.

I attach a number of blog entries made available in weeks 0 and 1 of the course to show some of my interests to others.

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Blog post: 14 September 2011

Introducing Austin Tate and Ai Austin

Let me introduce myself.. Austin Tate ... and my virtual worlds avatar... Ai Austin

Taking MSc modules for Semester 1 of 2011: "Introduction to Digital Environments for Learning", "e-Learning and Digital Cultures" and "Understanding Learning in On-line Environments".

Keywords:

Imported at: 19/09/2011 15:18 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 19 November 2011

Recollections of the first few years of the net

While reading Bell (2001) I was reminded of the time in the late 1960s and early 1970s when cyberculture was beginning.. and how quickly it grew after basic computer access and communication became possible. We are social beings. Let me recall a few things as stepping stones.

My own use of computers began in the days before networks were seriously developed. Computers were largely standalone big machines in air cooled facilities. My first programming exercises at a night class at Leeds Polytechnic around 1967 were submitted on coding sheets via punch operators on punched cards and the turn round was one week to the next evening class.

Things improved when I went to the University at Lancaster in 1969... we could punch our own cards :-) and then leave them in pigeon holes to be run overnight on the University's single ICL 1900 computer. A mistake in the program due to a simple typo was a no no if you wanted to get a result. We could program via flip switches in octal code a DEC PDP-8 that was the size of a large upright fridge freezer. I write some interrupt routines for a disc driver on a a basic operating system using a limit of 1K words of memory on that around 1970.

But things were changing and interactive access to the same type of computer was coming thanks to a link up between Edinburgh University AI people and Malcolm Atkinson, then the Computer Manager at Lancaster, and since then a long term colleague, co-investigator and recently Director of the National e-Science Centre based in Edinburgh. A precocious 17 year old programmer called John Scott at Lancaster wrote a real time access version of the Edinburgh POP-2 Language for the ICL 1900 and we were away into the cyberworld for real. We learned POP-2 for most of our programming exercises, for data structures, and for a new AI course at Edinburgh around 1970-1971 which I signed onto. These, and the consequent links to Edinburgh researchers interested in planning using computers set the direction for my whole career. With encouragement from Donald Michie and Jim Doran at Edinburgh I did a final year undergraduate project to build my first AI planner - Graph Traverser 4 - and used a "compilation" approach to how plans were composed. I applied it to a range of benchmark tasks that others had tried their planners on. It far outperformed the others. In July 1972 I was able to get a small grant to allow my continued work on this and its writeup to continue after my degree - my very first research grant!

Donald Michie in Edinburgh had offered me a PhD place at Edinburgh and I joined him at the Department of Machine Intelligence and Perception in October 1972. Real time access terminals using POP-2 and the time sharing Multi-POP system were the order of the day. But it was to be an exciting time...

Within a year the DEC-10 that was used by all AI researchers across Britain was installed in Edinburgh and became connected to the ARPANet - it was the 6th or 7th node on that network. Our access terminals could now be used to "Telnet" across to log on to other DEC-10s. I especially used the Stanford machine. There was rudimentary chat, and e-mail was started with the famous "@" character being used to address users on other hosts. Working for the first 2 hours each morning UK time I was often one of the few people on the entire network and had access to 2 DEC-10s for my work. Multi-User Dimensions (MUDs) were experimented with soon after in the machine I used at Stanford... and the rest is history...

Reference

Bell, D (2001) "Storying cyberspace 1: material and symbolic stories", chapter 2 of *An introduction to cybercultures*. Abingdon: Routledge. pp6-29.

[Repost of Blog Entry dated 28-Sep-2011 - to allow for inclusion in Introductory Section of IDEL11 Blog Presentation]

Keywords:

3 Comments (+/-)

1. Malcolm Atkinson added some more detail and the real facts in a message to me today…

   The machine at lancaster when you were there was an ICL 1909 with 32K 24-bit words and 4 tape decks. Jobs were submitted on punch cards.

   Andrew Colin and I added a exchangeable disk store holding 2 Megabytes. The drive cost £40K, half from EPSRC (then SRC) and half from the computer board, as a consequence of the Flower's report (his first I think — Peter Buneman's step dad) and we implemented a batch operating system taking 2K words, called June after the head operator, that then ran the batch service you allude to. Once we had done that, as we streamed input and output vi two of the tape decks, the rate of handling small jobs was much improved.
   With Wallace Anderson and Andy Lister, we bought a PDP8 (8K of 18-bit words?) and attached 8 teletypes to it, using it as a multiplexor and text editor, with a maximum of 256 words/teletype for the editable text buffer. We connected it to the ICL1909, and you could edit and submit jobs to it. That was working by late 1969 before I returned to Cambridge.

   I think there was another PDP8 obtained later for teaching; perhaps that is the one you used via its keys; although the replacement machine (which I had arranged to be a PDP10 and which was another ICL machine) ran a new ICL operating system: George 3, and all our work was discontinued. I worked on the DEC10 writing the POP-2 system for it with Ray Dunn for Donald Michie's round table, and was already hooked.

   The Computer manager was Wallace Anderson, he later went to Aberdeen to be computer services director there.

   I was a PDRA for a year and then a lecturer in the Maths department, under Elwyn Lloyd. Andrew & I designed the CS course, got it off the ground, and then did a UDI from Maths.

   John Scott did most of the ICL POP2 compiler. He who entered a chess program as a schoolboy, running on our 1909, versus Greenblatt's (?) chess program running on the MIT system, at the Machine Intelligence Workshop, 1968.

   My initial experience with interactive systems was with Cambridge Titan & Digital's DEC 10. At that time the DMIP mindset was paper-tape in and out of an Elliot 1409. I used the Timesharing service on the DEC10 run by Timesharing Ltd in Tottenham Court Road via an acoustically coupled modem that the GPO would not approve of from my house in the country in Dolphinholme. After an hour or two, I would get the teletype covered with splodges because an operator in the Morcambe manual exchange would have heard the weird noise, when wondering why the call was so long and listening in; she would then be plaintively asking "Is there anyone there?" sometimes generating or corrupting characters.

   EMAS was much later.

   We wrote about the Lancaster operating systems in the Computer Bulletin.

   Thanks for the chance to reminisce…

   Austin Tate on Saturday, 19 November 2011, 09:54 UTC

2. Oh..I remember those accoustic dial up modems too. 10 characters per second .. could put the entire phone headset into it and close the foam filled lid to improve the signal quality… size of a shoe box.

   And my PhD thesis in 1975 was typed on a 10cps teletype that output paper tape in the Machine Intelligence Research Unit in Hope Park Square at Edinburgh. Typing mistakes were quicker to fix by splicing in the punched out holes and manually punching the new ASCII character code.

   Austin Tate on Saturday, 19 November 2011, 09:55 UTC

3. *Siân Bayne* - October 4, 2011 at 15:06 - says:
   This is a fantastically direct and personal 'material story' to go alongside Bell's. You need to write a memoir - the fact that in the early days you were the first person to log on to the 'internet' in the morning is mind-boggling! Thanks for this Austin.

   Austin Tate on Saturday, 19 November 2011, 09:55 UTC

Imported at: 19/11/2011 09:56 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 15 September 2011

Ghosts of a Chance - All Eyes

My interests include 3D/CGI modelling (useful backgound for my interests in using Virtual Worlds), and graphic art. I very much like team projects and collaborative working, and have loved working in teams scattered across the globe on my projects and in my recreational interests. I hope to share some of these interests with you, and frankly to get an excuse to show some of the resulting artworks, through these blog entries.

In 2008 there was a number of web-based collective artworks created and shows at the Smithsonian American Art Museum's Luce Foundation Center. One called "ghosts of a chance " invited people to submit representations of eyes... photos, drawings, graphical concepts, etc. They were composed together and displayed in the final artwork... "All Eyes"...

Click on image for the full picture. See if you can find the one I submitted.

Keywords:

Imported at: 16/09/2011 07:20 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 15 September 2011

Supercar in Full Flight

This is the 3D model created in the 1990s of Supercar in collaboration between myself and Mick Imrie. Mick is the expert modeller. I did some simple Black Rock Lab buildings rather than the core vehicle. The model has been used in many digital environments since it was created, and now can be imported via the Collada model format into Second Life and OpenSim. The models are available at http://www.aiai.ed.ac.uk/~bat/GA/supercar-3d.html

Here is Supercar in full flight in OpenSim... My other car is a Toyota :-)

Keywords:

Imported at: 18/09/2011 21:14 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 13 September 2011

AI in the Movies - Discussion on The Terminator Film at the Edinburgh International Film Festival 2011

http://www.eusci.org.uk/podcasts/eusci-podcast-extra-conversation-ai-researchers

At the 2011 the Edinburgh International Film Festival, one of the events was a screening of the 1984 scifi classic The Terminator. The event was followed by a discussion with two real-life AI researchers from the University of Edinburgh School of Informatics. We managed to catch the two scientists before the event and talk to them about the past and future of AI, its perception in the media, and whether we should worry about the Robot Apocalypse.

Listen to our conversation with:

- Austin Tate, Professor of Knowledge-Based Systems
- Sethu Vijayakumar, Professor of Robotics

Keywords:

Imported at: 16/09/2011 07:20 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 15 September 2011

I-Room - a Virtual Space for Intelligent Interaction

One of my reseaerch interests is in the creation of "intelligent" meeting spaces for interaction between people and systems. The programme is called the "I-Room". More details are at: http://openvce.net/iroom

Let Ai Austin take you on a short tour of an I-Room through this YouTube video...

Keywords:

Imported at: 16/09/2011 07:19 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 19 September 2011

Life Wall

I have been inspired by the WallWisher and ideas for creative media in some of the course guides for the MSc in e-Learning... and have begun to think of ways to explore the use of tags and clippings to let someone tell their life story in unstructured, time line and narrative ways.

I wanted to look at the idea of your life in 2 x HD screens of display space. My trial setup is called 2 x HD x bat (my initial and long time computer login name). Spoken in a spelled out way as "two" "times" "h" "d" "times" "b" "a" "t".

More details are at http://atate.org/life-about.html

Keywords:

Imported at: 19/11/2011 10:25 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 22 September 2011

Life Wall Pro - and Refinements - and the Baby Pictures

The elements of the Life Wall have been encouraging me to dig out all sorts of stuff that was buried away, and recall events and dates (sometimes with the aid of my wife and others) which were already only dimly there. But they have been brought back to vivid life through developing my personal Life Wall. I assume everyone will want photos of them when very young on their Life Wall... there are few events in life as important as being born! The baby photos of me at a few months old and age 1 year are up there now. Did I look cute then?

The live Life Wall is at http://atate.org - Hover a mouse over a tag or clipping for more detail. Click on the thumbnails for some larger versions of the images.

Life Map

I had already added a link to a "Life Map" on which I think a lot of life's experiences could be noted through places visited and dated events. I feel this element of the Life Wall could be so valuable, that I have adjusted the clippings column that will map to one HD screen of presentation to allow for an embedded Life Map directly on the main display. There is a link to a larger map which could then be shown over 2 X HD displays when clicked.

Life Wall Pro

The Life Wall idea and presentation could also be adapted to professional purposes, e.g. to collect together and present a researcher's entire scientific contribution. It could allow then to look at their work and relationships. They could bring in professional contacts and the mappings between people, projects, organisations, tools, etc. Displays could include professional social network and project relationship diagrams (e.g. CMU Catalyst), FOAF, knowledge asset roadmaps (Macintosh, Filby and Tate, 1998), etc. I am developing this aspect now. As for Life Map Personal I hope to make the approach reasonably general and create an empty life map web area which other can copy and adapt to use themselves.

Reference:

Ann Macintosh, Ian Filby and Austin Tate (1998) "Knowledge Asset Road Maps" Proc. of the 2nd Int. Conf. on Practical Aspects of Knowledge Management (PAKM98) Basel, Switzerland, 29-30 Oct. 1998, (U. Reimer, ed.). Available from http://www.aiai.ed.ac.uk/project/oplan/documents/1998/98-pakm98-roadmaps.pdf

Keywords:

Imported at: 19/11/2011 10:25 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Objectives and Pre-Course Experience

Objectives and Pre-Course Experience

In this section, I note the objectives I set out with, and some of my experience in the first week 0 of the courses. I make notes about joining the community, getting up to speed quickly with the technology in use.

At the very end of the Presentation I wiol return to reflect on these objectives and my experience on the IDEL11 and other Semester 1 courses on the MSc in e-Learning

Top

Blog post: 15 September 2011

Personal Aims for Participating in the MSc in e-Learning

I will note these here to return to them nearer the end of the course to see if they are valid and how I change in my view of what I am seeking... but also to see if my objectives are being met.

- I wish to learn more about and make use of educational technology and methods for distance education delivery, assessment and community participation.
- I want to see the experience of distance education from the perspective of a student.

- I like a challenge and a clear target. An MSc is an achievable and valuable target. I do not currently have a Masters degree.
- I have a role as Coordinator for the Virtual University of Edinburgh, and an interest in educational and tutoring technology.
- I have a new role as Coordinator for Distance Education in the School of Informatics.
- I also have a research interest in collaboration for training and exercise support for communities involved in emergency response. See http://www.aiai.ed.ac.uk/project/plan/
- Interest in technology for the social web.
- I have a suitable window of opportunity since my teaching duties are suspended for 2011/12 as part of arrangements within my School for a sabbatical which I partially took in 2010/11 while keeping all duties.

Keywords:

Imported at: 28/11/2011 11:11 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 15 September 2011

Reflections on Week 0 - Joining, Issues and Orientation

Joining

Well... from applying to participating took 3 days. Thanks to some very cooperative colleagues in the School of Education. I was wondering if they might not take well to having a colleague join in as a student. But they have been very welcoming indeed. Thanks to Hamish, Sian, Rory, Clara and Jen especially in the setup period and for rapidly answering all the queries that flooded their way.

Money

Money reared its ugly ahead. I naively assumed staff members of the University could register for courses free like we used to be able to do some years ago. But times have moved on. Money must flow between business centres now. What a pain. As before colleagues in Education, the Institute for Academic Development, College and Central have been VERY supportive in looking for creative solutions. I do want to take the MSc as a genuine student and feel a target of an MSc is both achievable and valuable. And I want to do this seriously. I thought I would end up spending more time on this aspect than studying when asked to go through the hoops for what could essentially be a zero sum game. But no, by the end of the first week, we had confirmation of support at all levels and funding is to be found from the seed funds for distance education development in the University. Very good news indeed, and most encouraging. Good to know the University is still focused on really getting things done and can respond in an agile way.

Technology

There is a LOT of technology in use... maybe a necessary part of this type of course so we come across all sorts of different synchronous and asynchronous. But really there was a LOT. I have had to make a web page to remember the URLs, already have a list of user names and password... not all are EASE single sign on accessible. I have signed up for so many new services this week, and I was already a member of many of the popular ones to be used on the MSc. At one stage I even ended up with two accounts on one service.

Eventually though, with a bit of tutor guidance and a few well chosen questions to my tutors I find that there are really only 3 main links:

Holyrood Park Hub: http://www.elearning.education.ed.ac.uk (for all course materials and links)

MyWebCT via MyEd with EASE Login: https//www.myed.ed.ac.uk (for my specific courses)

Holyrood Park Weblog: http://holyroodpark.net/atate/weblog

Who are you?

And I got called Brian again.. my first name happens to be Brian. EASE did that. only my doctor and dentists call me Brian and I have stopped trying to correct them.

Family Relationships

My wife is sceptical and can see this as yet another life, beyond my first and second lives :-)

New Friends and Colleagues

I love collaborative work, and enjoy distance relationships for working and playing together. Its great to see the geographical spread and mix of people. I will see if the participants take to me putting in some personal stuff on collective digital artworks and some of my other interests,. But be ready to back off if its like talking about *cats* - see week 1 assignment "The Black Hole" - I cannot resist looking ahead.

Am I Overdoing the Contributions?

Then towards the weekend, I start to have serious concerns, growing with each e-mail I send to the tutors and each posting I make. I have read ahead a bit to some week 1 assignments and enjoyed making input on some stories from the experience of others on distance education courses. The "Black Hole" particularly rang a bell with me, so I added a comment. Then realised it is maybe premature as it is for week 1 work. I consider deleting it. But end up adding comments on other stories as I read them. Then I realise I have nothing to add on one story about "The Loner". I keep coming back to it, wondering what to add, and even whether to reply to a comment already there

Then... I start to get paranoia about comments from a tutor in the course forums that they hope things settle down next week and that other quiet folks should be encouraged versus the vocal ones. I am not normally paranoid... but since I already was worried I was perhaps putting too much in and asking too many questions, I can see I am part of the problem. I resolve to read more and comment

less. Then worry that may not be great for assessment purposes! Then I feel glad I did NOT add an entry where I had nothing to say about "The Loner" story. Ah, such is paranoia. But I am sure I will get over it :-)

Keywords:

2 Comments (+/-)

1. There is so much fascinating material already in your blog, Austin, that I wondered about which point was most appropriate for me to come in. This entry resonated with my own experiences so much that I've decided to start here. Because I've only been here a couple of weeks as a lecturer myself, I've been through all the different logins and routes and the huge range of passwords needed – and had come to similar conclusions to you about distilling down the most important entry points.

   It is very rewarding to see all these issues from a student perspective and I undertook the MSc myself to find out what it was like being an online student. (I didn't expect that I'd like it so much I'd end up being a lecturer on the course - but I'm delighted at how it's turned out.) I too worried about how I was perceived and frequency of contributions - but I now think that some version of this paranoia is common to most students. I've been asking students for many years what they look forward to and what concerns they have about university life: the most common answers - to both questions - seems to be meeting others and getting on with the work. Money has in recent years become a major third concern. But the overwhelming questions seem to be "will I be able to do it?" and "will I fit in?"

   I like the way you have put down markers here about your concerns and, in the following entry, about your aspirations. You are right that it will be very interesting to return to these entries later on and see what you make of them in the light of subsequent experiences.

   I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to be tutor to such an interesting blogger and know that I'm going to learn a lot from you! There are already some links that I want to follow up when I really should be getting on with something else. I look forward to our dialogues; I probably won't comment on every entry but that won't mean that I'm not reading them or not interested.

   Christine Sinclair on Monday, 19 September 2011, 14:09 UTC

2. Thanks Christine. Shows we are BOTH not REALLY paranoid then.

   Focus is an issue... and I note it mostly when I have to settle down to do one solid bit of reading and commenting, so I know I will have to watch that.

   But there really are so many things going on in this interesting space that its difficult not to get distracted by trying them out.

   Austin Tate on Monday, 19 September 2011, 14:48 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 11:45 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Week-by-Week

Week-by-Week

In this section, I include my "Reflections" Blog postings on a week-by-week basis.

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Blog post: 16 September 2011

Reflections on Week 1.1 - EUCLID, Using Tools and Looking Right Ahead

EUCLID Experience

I applied last week on EUCLID having been asked to do a formal application by the College Office. The whole process was pretty smooth. It provided good feedback to students at all stages. It was good to see this process from a student perspective. I was given an e-mail with a "continuation" link right at the first stage which was reassuring. But I did have a glitch after 6 of the 8 or so steps and Internet Explorer refused to continue with messages about cookies not being enabled (when they were). This persisted for a few attempts and alternative routes to recover, so I had to give up.

Then when I came to use the e-mailed continuation link, it would not let me login with the credentials given. This was some half an hour after they had been mailed. I contact the IS help desk who very quickly came back (even at 9pm at night - Yan). he explained that the username setup can take some time. A long delay like that is not something anyone would expect. It may be worth warning EUCLID applicants of this in the e-mail they are sent we initially applying.

One process issue I spotted was at the point where a student place was offered and accepted. Up to then, the e-mail address provided on application is used for all correspondence, and to tell you items are waiting in EUCLID. It seems that at the point of registration the process establishes a student e-mail address - in my case s1200634@sms.ed.ac.uk - and e-mails get send there. My matriculation details and form for example were sent there. But as you have no indication e-mail is going to a new account you lose communication. The process should at least inform you when a student e-mail account is set up for you. The setting up of a forwarding filter is itself a technical process which some students might find difficult at first. I made a mistake in writing the regular expression

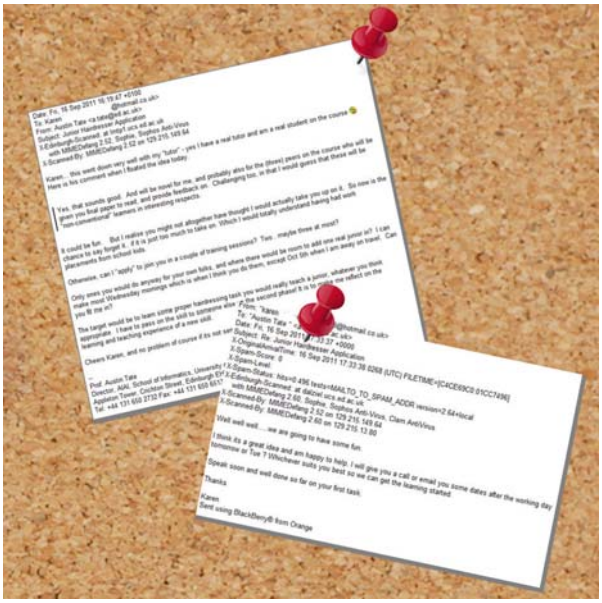
rule and took 3 attempts to get a forward attempt to work. An improvement to the process would be to set up the SMS student account with a default filter rule that also forwards the mail to the originally provided applicant's e-mail address.

Learning Challenge on Understanding Learning Course

I have some fun thinking about this one. I had been considering an appropriate and suitably interesting, challenging and achievable learning task... I was intrigued to see that motor skills can be considered as well as more cognitive knowledge-based tasks. So I was considering a range of things when I happened to be at the hairdresser and a new junior was being assisted by a senior colleague while she washed my hair. That got me thinking...

Speaking with the senior stylist there, a L'Oreal I.D. Expert, who I happen to know is one of the top hairdressers trainers in Scotland, and an award winner, I asked what a junior hairdresser can expect to learn in their first training periods and how long such training takes. We chatted about the initial skills: hair washing; customer interaction; blow drying; colour removal; colouring; etc. Training typically takes place on a half day when the salon is closed, and practiced on dummies, and colleagues. And the taken into the salon gradually. We chatted more and I explained about the learning challenge. I could sense an opportunity.

I think this might be a novel and fun challenge. Quite different to what I normally do. Involving interaction with different people. The Stylist thought it would be cute to have a skill where I could offer to professional blow dry my wife's hair. When I mentioned this to my wife she said she would prefer me to get a motor skill like ironing, cooking or painting windows! She also said that it was a good job I had not been to the dentist and suggested that as a learning challenge!



My "application" as junior hairdresser was accepted and my training sessions are set up for 19th and 26th October. I will be training initially on a dummy head. I will be given advance reading about brush shape and choice and the reasons to use different brushes. I am required to maintain a training log book. I am also told to arrive in smart casual clothing (better update my outfit with all those young things about) and expect to get hot.

Private Weblog... Really?

I have been using the Weblog to make notes on upcoming work, ideas, outline reports, etc. It is my approach to do outline far in advance of delivery dates. I am a natural list maker but relax as soon as things are on a list (its a known condition some call "Zygaric Stress"). But I really do want these to be private as they give away ideas I don't want to introduce, even to tutors, until the right time. I wonder who can peek in :-)

Tools

All week, I was still adding more and more web sites, tools, user names and passwords to get set up for the courses. There really are a LOT. I sugegsted that we establish a Twitter tag #msculoe for the Understanding Learning in the Online Environment course, which the course tutor approved.

I have not used the a.nnotate tool before to allow for discussion threads via post it style notes on papers. I think it works very well.

I was having trouble with http://holyroodpark.net/atate which did not seem to show all my posts. Ones posted in week 0 as introductions for example were not showing in my "All Posts" link, and cannot be found in the Search facility even when the exact post title is used. But a direct URL access for such posts is available where I have a record of that elsewhere. I reported this in the IDEL forums, and was advised to use the"Archive" link which does reach all your own posts.

Other Future Assignments

I have begun thinking ahead for assignments and possible topics. I like to get outlines I am comfortable with, and then spend some time collecting ideas, notes and materials. I don't like to be up against deadlines.

Ethnographic studies for IDEL: I wonder if I can use the 300 or so people that have registered on OpenVCE.net and involved in emergency response communities, suitably anonymised.

Essay Topics for Understanding Learning in On-line Environments. Possible areas could pick up on my interests in mixed initiative tutorial environments, and the process-product planning cycle (relate to Carroll's task-artifact cycle model - http://www.interaction-

design.org/encyclopedia/task_artifact_cycle.html). We could contrast the mixed-initiative approach with purely top down teacher driven learning and bottom up student driven discovery (relate to "Zone of proximal development" by Vygotsky, at suggestion of Hamish Macleod - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zone_of_proximal_development). A theme of "mixed initiative approaches to distance education" might make a good theme to propose. It could explore the using the <I-N-C-A> model of sets of issues to address, activities to perform, constraints to maintain, and annotations/notes model for the production of educational materials, to define educational goals and their adaptive refinement to specific learner contexts. And perhaps look at a next generation of more effective intelligent learning environments which can use these to support those involved as tutors and students in distance education. This area might make a good lead in to the main dissertation.

Project for Digital Cultures Course - I have been experimenting with the idea of a "**Life Wall**" - your life in tags and clippings in unstructured and structured timeline forms for display on 2 X HD display screens. I spent some time getting a flow style sheet and outline web page that would work as I want to let me explore ideas. I will blog about this separately as my ideas develop. For the Digital Cultures assessment, this Life Wall may perhaps be used to find a way to present an academic programme of research, its themes and areas of influence, the work that went into it, and the results, publications and applications impact that arose. Relate to programme "road maps".

Main Dissertation: I have made some notes on a possible dissertation area.

1. The area of "collaborative work over the Internet for work and play" could be promising... and would let me explore some of the case histories I have been involved in for both professional and recreational purposes. I once wrote a book with someone I never met until after it was published (Reading in Planning: Allen, Hendler and Tate). We have done much work with multi-national emergency response communities, especially via OpenVCE.net. Recreationally, we created many Gerry Anderson 3D modelling assets (GA-MMA) and Supercar assets between people scattered all round the globe.
2. Another possible area is the use of a virtual worlds classroom assistant that would be available in the classroom 24/7 and supportive of people using the room. It might use non-player character (NPC) technology just now appearing in OpenSim. It could link up and use chatbot technology (MyCyberTwin for example) with suitable FAQs, tutorial capability, etc. It might make use of the I-X helper. Care would be taken to ensure I focus on areas where I have done the development and concepts and development myself, such as in the area of virtual personalities using chat and NPC embodiment.
3. A serious possibility could be to look at mixed initiative interaction as a model for distance education. see notes under Understanding Learning above.

Money and Matriculation

Well the payment of fees got sorted out really quickly between the various parts of the University. I was most impressed. Will not be so cynical for a while. I also matriculated so I am now a fully fledged student and staff member simultaneously.

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 11:46 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 21 September 2011

Reflections on Week 1.2 - Work Proper

Now we are into the course proper... and a pattern of work has to be set that can be maintained. There are a number of web areas, WallWisher displays, blogs, discussion forums and WebCT work areas to be monitored. My computers are set up now with a page with the relevant links that I can step through in a regular way. I have also tested iPad use and can see what does and does not seem to work to be more efficient.

My colleagues on the courses have already started to help me in my own technology use, which shows part of the value of being in a new and vibrant community of interested and interesting folks.

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 11:47 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

Top

Blog post: 21 September 2011

Reflections on Week 2.1 - Readings, PDF and Publisher Restrictions on Access

I have now got more organised with the various core and secondary readings I need to do on my courses. PDF is handy as I can load it onto my iPad, and will be able to take it on my travels. I will be away for much of week 4, and that could be a good time to get on top of, or ahead on the readings. On-line access will be very limited as there is only cellular (expensive) access where I will be. I find the restrictive paid for subscriptions a total pain. A check out time on some of 1 day is ludicrous. Useless for those of us that travel. I suspect many distance learners will really be affected by this sort of thing. We should boycott such publishers and stick to open published works in PDF. When their citation counts drop through the floor that will stop them restricting academic access to academically produced material. Course tutors should try to avoid recommending works that are not openly accessible as stable PDF that does not time out.

Keywords:

2 Comments (+/-)

1. I think all of the course team is probably in favour of open access materials as far as possible but the world seems to be in a state of transition with regard to this. It's annoying when there is a reading that you know would be ideal but you can't get the appropriate permissions in place. But I'll certainly be bearing your comment here in mind as I get into setting up courses. There are interesting political and pedagogic issues here with wider implications than our own course.

   Christine Sinclair on Friday, 23 September 2011, 07:53 UTC

2. Thanks Christine... understood. I was on the copyright negotiation committee for AI Journal with Elsevier, so have had many years of this. I also established AIAI's publication policy when we were first formed in 1983 and since then for every publication we reserve the right to use as WE wish. That policy was also adopted by Informatics when we were formed. Our staff are not ALLOWED to assign copyright away for normal papers (except for commercial arrangements for their books, etc).

   Austin Tate on Friday, 23 September 2011, 08:00 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 11:48 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 21 September 2011

Reflections on Week 2.2 - Reading Pace and Settling Down

Reading Pace and Settling Down

I had anticipated that settling down to read significant numbers of papers on academic topics would be a challenge for me. I know that I have a high work rate, but am so divided in my time on many concurrent tasks that concentration for a significant period on any one task can be a problem. For some time recently, I have set aside one day per week to work from home to manage this, and find I can catch up and clear these longer tasks, such as examinations, PhD reviews, academic paper reading and reviewing, etc.

I found that by the end of week 1 I had read, but not really absorbed, the required core reading, and some secondary readings for all the courses I am on in the MSc in e-Learning. I took the opportunity to read again some Wikipedia overviews on different schools of learning which acted as a useful summary. I also got more organised with the course core rand secondary readings making them available to myself as PDF without going into WebCT... which proves too much of a distraction with dozens of discussion messages coming in... which would easily distract me into interesting, but unfocussed, new work.

So, as I settled down to week 2 reading, with a bit more structure to the learning types that are in the literature, I started to make more notes in the margins and to extract content I found interesting. The very many secondary reading links, and new literature links that appear in the discussion forums is overwhelming for the early part of the course, but I think will progressively be of more value when a steady and sustainable work pace is set.

Keywords:

1 Comments (+/-)

1. Keeping up with the reading is quite difficult, especially when you are likely to make connections with all sorts of other readings of your own. I empathise with this as I'm having to do it for myself just now. Students rarely have sufficient time to do all the possible reading; there is always a sense that you could do more. Using an iPad will help the organisation I think. It also helps to create ways of focusing, as you are doing. I often tell students to read with a specific question in mind as it makes the reading more interesting - though I don't think lack of interest is an issue in your case!

   You quite often mention focus and I'm not surprised, with so much going on. We shall explore this topic in Week 11, under the heading of "Speed, Silence and Sanctuary". Are we losing something because of the "Tyranny of the moment" (Eriksen)? Getting the balance right between being strategic and contemplative is sometimes difficult. While I always claimed to be a genuine student (when people accused me of not being!) I did recognise that when you've been a student a few times you do learn that you can trust yourself with some processes, even at times when you feel overwhelmed and confused. That did give the mature student some advantages over the less experienced ones.

   I wish you all the best in finding your steady and sustainable work pace. I am confident that you will, even though it might not always feel so at the time!

   Christine Sinclair on Monday, 26 September 2011, 14:12 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 11:48 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

Top

Blog post: 27 September 2011

Reflections on Week 2.3 - Balance, Push and Pull

Reading More Under Control

Having got a bit more organised with my reading I am just about on top of it at the end of week 2. I had time to read the papers ahead of a Skype chat in IDEL11 today and ready for an evening SyncTube chat for EDEDC11 later this evening.

I have found that as I develop some interests for possible essays on ULOE11, that I am making more sense of the readings on cognitive psychology approaches to learning, which before were washing over me. Reading with a purpose is always much more satisfying and useful.

As I am travelling now for over a week, I have looked ahead and got core readings and some secondary material in offline PDF reading formats to take with me for weeks 3 and 4.

Twitter - Push and Pull

I have been following the various searches on hash tags associated with the MSc in e-Learning overall (#mscel) and with the 3 modules I am on (#mscidel #msculoe #ededc) but the tools I am using are not good for keeping in touch. Tweetdeck was recommended by the Digital Cultures tutors and is great on the desktop, but, after Tweetdeck was purchased by Twitter themselves, the iPad verson has been deleted in favour of the Twitter's own app. Typical buy-to-close-down approach by the big boys. The multiple column feeds which could include searches as well as @name follows was good in Tweetdeck, but is unsupported in Twitter's own app. I will keep looking for a good tool - as its not realistic to keep manually checking all these feeds.

Keywords:

3 Comments (+/-)

1. You seem to be very well organised - as is necessary for so much multitasking. Your assignment ideas seem to be helping you to keep focused.

   I wasn't too sure where to put this observation, but wanted to reassure you about private spaces so your latest "restricted" entry seemed the best. I am conscious that in an earlier entry you expressed some concerns and so I checked this out. The only person who can see everything is Jen, because of her technical role - and she says she wouldn't look at anything meant to be private. I wouldn't want to see things either that are not intended; I find assessment demanding enough without that added complication!

   I am interested in the notion of the "backstage" (Goffman) and see it as having advantages and disadvantages online, some of which will not be clear to new bloggers. I personally like blogging for a "future self" because it reminds me of what was happening backstage - I sense you do too. But it may not be appropriate to show all the workings and there are many complex issues and theories associated with this, some of which will undoubtedly be coming up later.

   I'm very much enjoying reading your blog(s) and look forward to more on your return. We can perhaps start to explore some of these theoretical perspectives a little.

   Christine Sinclair on Friday, 30 September 2011, 10:16 UTC

2. I think I know what you mean about blogging for a "future self" but would very much like you to erlaborate on that ina few sentences in you have time.

   Thanks for the pointer to the frontstage/backstage prsentations of self work of Erving Goffman which I looked into - http://orgtheory.wordpress.com/2010/03/28/goffmans-front-and-backstages/ - I can relate to that.

   The "Private" blog messsages are not super sensiive. But they are places I am drafting notes and responses to some future assignments and don't necessarily want to give away some of my thinking yet :-) I am preparing my "act" backstage. I could of course just keep private notes in a different medium, but I like to stick to a common set of technologies to learn more of them and allow more effective exchange to the "frontstage" when I am ready. Between you and me I have already finished one module assignment (not on this course) due at week 5 time. I like to get ahead while I can and while I am on a roll. As there will be some weeks when I cannot do as much.

   Austin Tate on Friday, 30 September 2011, 10:50 UTC

3. I undertook the MSc myself to research being an online student. It's a labour-intensive way of researching (all those essays!) and I now want to write up for publication some of the stuff I found. But I kept a public blog about it, which I have mined for information when I've been advising students (in my previous job) especially about academic writing. I wanted to capture the process of writing an assignment in all its messiness. I see that in the blog I refer to the blog itself as an extension of memory - and I think that is what I mean as well. Once we have successfully completed something, it is easy to forget the backstage. Yet online there can be traces of it. I wonder whether some of it *should* be forgotten - and I now wish I hadn't called the blog "confessions" in case it gives the message that people ought to confess. But I did want to show students that even experienced lecturers can struggle with the process of writing or understanding something new.

   I seemed to have a Chinese following on this blog - and Google translate suggests that their observations were not all of a pornographic nature (though some were!)

Christine Sinclair on Sunday, 02 October 2011, 09:34 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 11:48 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 28 September 2011

Reflections on Week 2.4 - Life Wall Dominates Word Count in my Blogs

A Wordle word scatter diagram of my blogs for IDEL11 on Holyrood Park and for EDEDC11 on edc11.education show that the work I did to create a "Life Wall" at http://atate.org/ has been my top focus in the first couple of weeks of the MSC in e-Learning. I very much like Wordle diagrams to show threads for work over a long period... and have used them for some years on my Publications sites at

- O-Plan Programme Publications - 1983 to 1999 - http://www.aiai.ed.ac.uk/project/oplan/documents/
- I-X Programme Publications - 1983 to present - http://www.aiai.ed.ac.uk/project/ix/documents/

Keywords:

1 Comments (+/-)

1. I love Wordle too, Austin - it does help expose what words are particularly significant to individuals and groups. It looks as though you're doing a sort of stock-take that will provide a useful basis for considering any changes that might occur during a programme of study. This is especially useful for someone with such a wide range of existing experience and knowledge - but others who see this might want to try it too. It can be helpful to find out what you're thinking/writing about!

Christine Sinclair on Thursday, 29 September 2011, 06:38 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 11:52 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 05 October 2011

Reflections on Week 3.1 - Looking into the Course through a Keyhole

Reading

I am travelling this week and in a location with no broadband or desktop computer. So, I planned to catch up on reading and perhaps get a little ahead. I find I am now wanting to get the paper out to read, making more notes and wishing I had more time to comment.

Through a Keyhole

When travelling like this, I usually use a mobile device and 3G wireless access and limit myself to basic e-mail and a few low bandwidth browser operations. I make notes and lists of things to do on my return. But the period of absence from Edinburgh was longer than usual this time, and thing can start to build up quickly. After a few days I find I am spending longer making notes on what I must do when I return than actually working on something productive. The (lack of) speed and (lack of) screen real estate becomes a serious problem for much of the type of work I do, but this week that was made more acute with the types of web pages and visual material in use on the MSc in e-Learning courses. The typical type of web page served by a CMS like WordPress, Drupal or Joomla, and even Twitter, is filled with images, thumbnails, and other bandwidth hungry elements, and if usually designed with style layouts which do not allow for progressive rendering. A blank page is offered while many many elements download and then the page appears some time later. These sorts of sites are almost unusable on a typical 3G connection independent of screen size... and this becomes especially frustrating if this is the bulk of the material being accessed. I quickly developed a sense that I was peering at the world through a very small key hole.

Keywords:

1 Comments (+/-)

1. The keyhole is an interesting idea - I sometimes have felt "locked out" of the university because of technical problems, which seems to be using the same metaphor. It can happen in Second Life too, and so can some surreal in-between stages as people feel they are half in and half out of the environment. These issues are worth thinking about for students who might be permanently in areas of low bandwith – how do we ensure that they are included? Or do we just say that they can't participate?

There are some analogies here to the problems of disability; what is disabling – the condition or the environment in which people find themselves?

Christine Sinclair on Wednesday, 05 October 2011, 10:33 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 11:49 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 07 October 2011

Reflections on Week 3.2 - White Screens and Appropriate Social Media

Travel and White Screen

The week was characterised for me by being on travel and working with mobile devices and a slow 3G connection. It is a time to remember that not all our students and distance learners are on fast broadband networks, and every item of content, image and thumbnail download and reload for trivial clicks must be paid for. I experienced blank white browsers screens for over a minute while typical content management systems like WordPress composed their page for rendering... made up of hundreds of images and user icons.. and then showed it all at once.. immediately followed by some click to get you really where you want to be (like login prompt) followed by a total reload of every one of the same content items. These systems are poorly designed for bandwidth limited connections, mobile devices and so on. The systems seem not to have provided fall back styles, and forgotten the art of low bandwidth images, progressive rendering of pages with image and tables sizes predefined, etc.

Twitter, Discussion Forums and Blogs

I can continue to interact reasonably well with others I collaborate with via Twitter while on travel. Though not having a simple way to view new tweets to #tags is an issue... only supported in systems I have with TwitterDeck on my desktops. I will blog separatekly about experience this week of using Twitter for class discussions for IDEL11. Threaded discussion Forums are easier to follow, keep up to date with and input to, they can be looked back over indefinitely, searched, and new posts can easily be seen. I would say should be a preferred mode of operations for distance educators. Skype is okay if permitted in your location, but is bandwidth hungry, needs a 100% time connection (3G can drop out frequently in low signal areas), but not ideal for some topics that do not require synconicity. Blog posting are possible, but massive over use of images, header images and so on make this an expensive and time consuming frustrating process for the distance learner or user.

Reading and Comments

I did manage to get on top of core readings for my MSc in e-Learning modules and do some of the secondary reading.

Keywords:

1 Comments (+/-)

1. You are raising some important issues about access, accessibility and appropriate media. I also enjoyed your public entry about Twitter being "unfit for purpose" -you make some good points here. I personally liked the Twittorial more than I expected to but I was pleased to be able to go back over it later, as things happened too quickly for me to keep on top of it in terms of thinking more deeply about the issues raised.

   I have still to read the paper on Twitter that Clara posted; I'm interested in theoretical/pedagogic perspectives on the potential and actual uses of media. Hamish once said something that has stuck with me: the places we are appropriating for education are places that people are already using for other purposes - and they have their own purposes and ways of being. This is perhaps something that isn't always factored into institutional discussions about media.

Christine Sinclair on Monday, 10 October 2011, 10:46 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 11:53 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 07 October 2011

Reflections on Week 3.3 - Twitter for Class Discussions - Unfit for Purpose

I want to make some observations on the use this week of Twitter for the Edinburgh MSc in e-Learning IDEL11 class discussions about core readings and topics. Obviously one purpose is to test a variety of tools and modalities of interaction for distance education purposes, so I will give my experience as a student in this case.

Twitter is a valuable "push" short messaging and trending platform. Due to the volume of material appearing on it, lack of archiving facilities, lack of search over long periods and lack of good clustering methods in most tools it is unsuited to discussions which by their nature are threaded and need linearity in reading posts from multiple participants. The tweeter should not assume the group members see every (or even most) tweets, and there is no confirmation of what they have and have not seen.

Shortened URLs are frequently applied by tools when tweets are posted, and this loses much valuable context for the citation or reference given.

Public accessibility and possibly permanent online availability and reposting by others of the tweets also may preclude argumentation more suited to a closed audience or group.

Seeking to use Twitter to follow 4 #tags on 3 MSc in e-Learing courses is impractical on most Twitter interfaces, including the official Twitter.com provided web site and mobile apps. I found only TweetDeck for Desktop as recommended for the Digital Cultures course (but not the mobile versions of TweetDeck) suitable for such uses... but that is disruptive via its new tweet arrival notification mechanism when trying to concentrate on other work.

My use of Twitter was also on low bandwidth and error prone 3G connections, and using small screen mobile devices, but I think my observations are valid even without that limitation.

I found the threaded discussion forums on WebCT much easier to follow while travelling, and the times at which they can be checked and inputs given can be managed better and more asynchronously.

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 11:53 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 14 October 2011

Reflections on Week 4 - Feeling at Home in Second Life

This week felt very comfortable and familiar to me... as we were experimenting in Second Life and Virtual Worlds.

I took the introduction seriously, and attended the full session... and did the exercises. I tried not to appear too much as a smart alex when Frank Lassard and Pancha Enzyme were helping new users. Everyone did very well, as I know its really tricky when people first start.. and the last thing they want is someone showing off too much.

I looked at the EduNation regions Second Life and commented on those areas and how they are set up as part of the set work fro IDEL11. There was time to read the core papers and one of the secondary readings ahead of a tutorial to discuss the content. the session, not surprisingly, was mostly taken up with help to people still getting to grips with Second Life. But some points about the paper were made, and I transferred the relevant points to the discussion forum on WebCT to archive.

ULOE11 was a cerebral week with lots of philosophy and cognitive psychology readings... I am getting through them gradually. Hundreds of discussion forum items need thought before responses. I am using my ideas on a essay topioc to focus my interest in these readings, makign notes as I go along.

Digital Cultures EDC11 was fun as usual... this week we were creating a digital artifact... and I went to town again... spending most of last weekend doing the backstop programming of new non-player character (NPC) and avatar cloning facilities in OpenSim to get a background for the artifact. Its a live "show" on the OpenSim-based Openvue grid. It has multiple layers of meaning for me and uses my usual mix of type and layout as well as imagery to convey my interests. I crated a wide variety of re-usable assets, e.g. portraits of my avatars in the various outfits I have used over the last 6 years, as part of the work. I created a rationale section and "in progress build" section to show how the artifact was created. the full information is at http://atate.org/ai/ai/ Commenting on the artifacts created by classmates is now ongoing for the rest of the week and weekend.

Background work on setting up a Moodle 2.x Virtual learning Environment at a server in AIAI has continued... as we needed to do background work to update our Apache/PHP/MySQL setup; Now that is done, we have a working up to date Moodle to try out ourselves and with a new PhD student whose interests are in Intelligent Virtual learning Environments (a project we call I-LE).

Keywords:

2 Comments (+/-)

1. It can be strange - though often salutary - to attend an introduction to a subject/space where you are already very knowledgeable. Your professional expertise brings a distinctive perspective on the pedagogical implications of SL. You have some excellent observations on Warburton on the discussion board, specifically referring to the importance of task. These could be usefully included here too and perhaps expanded on. Some of my other bloggers are asking questions about whether this environment is really appropriate for high level pedagogy; I'm sure you would also have some insights on that. I'm looking forward to seeing what you have to say about identity in relation to this week's discussion. I've already been sidetracked by your Digital Cultures work (and lost this comment in the process) and have had to promise myself some time to have a proper look at it later.

   I wondered, as I read this entry, about your own thoughts on having experienced people on a course. This may be something you also encounter in your own work. Personally, I think it is great to have a range of experience in a classroom or virtual programme - and the MSc certainly has students with a wide range of backgrounds. But there can be tensions between the student role and the expert role - you are sensitive to that. Perhaps the blog is a useful place to explore these issues.

   I remember a colleague in a similar position taking a course, who was challenged in a piece of assessment, and said: "Why would I have to provide evidence of X? They know I'm an international expert in this area!" And my reply was, "But for the purposes of this course, you are a student - and students are expected to provide evidence of X!" It was something I had to remind myself about too, when I was tempted to go into teacher mode sometimes!

Your own sensitivity to these issues will help you to get a lot from this experience, I'm sure. I look forward to your next batch of insights and tantalising links! I'll be doing a more formal review commentary during this week.

Christine Sinclair on Monday, 17 October 2011, 10:50 UTC

2. Thanks Christine. I do try my best to give information and links on things I am discussing, and very much enjoy the engagement with the others on the course. There is a fantastic range of experience and skills on the MSc courses. There should be things to discuss about identity, avatars and otherwise, when online. And in my Digital Cultures course we are looking at virtual communities and what makes them so in an ethnographic study. I plan to use a very different community to the professional community I looked at for the "learner group" in ULOE11.

Austin Tate on Monday, 17 October 2011, 12:38 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 11:54 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 21 October 2011

Reflections on Week 5.1 - Rationale for VW Issues, and Gaining Control over Learning Assets

The work on IDEL11 in virtual worlds, Second Life and on avatar and personal identity suited me in this last two weeks, as I have been using the Second Life, OpenSim and other virtual worlds platforms for some time. It was good to interact with others who have experience, and some who have never been in a virtual world before and hear their comments. This is very relevant to my research as we support totally new users in making serious use of such platforms, and we know how awkward the technology can be to use initially for such new users, who just want to get on with some exercise or collaborative meeting.

One of the IDEL11 course readings (Warburton, 2009) on the uses of Second Life for education resonated directly with our own experience, and it was useful to see some of the academic thinking behind what we come across as issues in real use. Warburton's analysis of the rich and multiple means to communicate and maintain presence and status awareness was also directly relatable to a "Cognitive Work Analysis" (CWA) which we use as a guide to our support to a distributed collaboration community we work with in the USA. I can take the readings and citations in such papers directly into our productive use of these environments.

My competitive side came out in the IDEL11 Second Life Treasure Hunt. I found the location pretty quickly... but wanted to do an "arty" image of my avatar in a "cell of life" next to the target garden... which was apparently treated as not on target by one of the tutors! Quite right too. So I snapped another rather boring image of me sat in the garden... but it preyed on my mind as I liked the original cell image. So I went back and composed another image looking through the cell to the garden beyond. All snaps are in the Holyrood Park Blog.

Similarly on the Digital Cultures course... I completed the "Digital Artifact" - an exercise I entitled "AI - Avatar Identity" last weekend... but just had to go back over it and add a short machinima... now on YouTube. Another 2 hours gone.. but enjoyably so. See http://atate.org/ai/ai/ for the artifact and YouTube video.

The first half of the first semester of the MSC in e-Learning seems to have shot by. It is taking all the hours there are available. But I am enjoying it. The IDEL11 and Digital Cultures format and exercises have suited my style of working. I like collaborating and interacting. This opportunity brings out the thwarted (but not very capable) artist in me. I always feel I have more ideas than I can translate to graphical results I feel capture what I want to communicate. The courses offers a platform to release some of this.

The number of images put into blogs and posted on my web site has been growing... and I normally have an organised structure for larger projects... so I did some reorganisation into the normal project folders we would use. This means some image URLs have altered... I think I caught all the references in the Holyrood Park blog and I hope the various discussion forums that have used them... but its possible I missed some indirect references in postings. If you come across any unserved images in my postings please let me know so I can correct then. The mapping is http://atate.org/mscel/image.jpg -> http://atate.org/mscel/img/image.jpg

But I have not just been learning on IDEL11 and Digital Cultures... on ULOE11 this week I started my "learning challenge" which is to learn to be a junior hairdresser and how to blow dry in particular. This has also been fun... and a great talking point with others... who must think I am going mad. See progress at http://atate.org/mscel/hair/

But things are mushrooming, with ethnographic studies starting in Digital Cultures, more reading than ever in ULOE11, and much to come on all the modules. I also spoke with Hamish MacLeod this week on a number of distance education and research related matters as well as touching base on my choice of modules for Semester 2.

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 11:54 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 23 October 2011

Reflections on Week 5.2 - Choice and Work Style

In the last week I have been discussing my choices of module for semester 2, looking forward to the MSc dissertation and addressing choices of essay topic for ULOE11, amongst other assignment thoughts on IDEL11 and Digital Cultures. It has helped me think about my own learning style and ways in which I work effectively and ways in which I am not so effective. It comes down to this

- I love collaboration, interaction with others and constant exchanges
- I really don't like sitting still reading on my own and long writing exercises

The choice of modules in semester 2 could involve a the game-based learning module which its high interactivity, work on the research methods module with others to prepare the way for the dissertation, and a largely personal study on a topic of interest to me and that could be useful in my own research. I can see me leaning straight away towards the game-based learning module with its high levels of collaboration and teamwork. That's a no-brainer.

But I had an interesting experience in suggesting an essay topic for ULOE11. I had ots of ideas on what to do, but was struggling to find something contained enough to do in the time available. I was planning something that would give me a good grounding in educational cognitive psychological approaches that could explain what was happening in mixed-initiative scenario-based training, which is what I am often working with in my research. But initial reading indicated it was vast topic. So I suggested a more limited look at ways in which AI had been used to assist in argumentation about core educational psychology readings in the ULOE11 discussion forum and why having a disembodied "agent" to use as an example helped in such discussions. I was reasoning that I could pick up on the discussion forum threads and present them - hopefully in a coherent way. But soon after I suggested this.. I started to feel uneasy... and I know why... it seemed to be a box ticking exercise... to do the essay... I had no **reason** to do it for my interferes. It did not **fit** into the emerging themes of interest to me - into the **story**. I have made another suggestion for the ULOE11 essay that I believe fits, and could be sufficiently scoped to be something I can get a good outcome on.

Keywords:

1 Comments (+/-)

1. There are all sorts of tensions for students coming out in this reflective piece - e.g. between being strategic and doing what you think is worthwhile or intrinsically interesting. Then there is tailoring a task to the constraints of e.g. word counts, time available, assessment criteria. It seems that you're finding a good way through all this.

   There are some associated implications for teaching: we really need to make sure that students *can* find good ways through this. Can we simultaneously accommodate the preferences of the collaborative interactive student and the one who likes sitting still reading and writing? Should these preferences be accommodated within a single module (for example through choice of assessment), across the course (through a range of distinctive modules), or across institutions (through being associated with a particular approach to course design)? Should we accept that some students are entirely strategic and have no intrinsic interest in their course - they'll *want* the box ticking. Or is this counter productive for everyone?

   I suppose I'm happy with accommodating some preferences, such as reading vs action - but less happy about others, such as learning vs commodity. Yet students do still need to be strategic to a certain extent. (I know I did - and sometimes wasn't strategic enough.)

   I like your idea of "the story" and what fits into it: every student will have their own story.

   Christine Sinclair on Monday, 24 October 2011, 15:07 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 11:55 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 21 October 2011

Reflection on Week 6.1 - In the Long Run

This week I have begun to look at issues of sustainability... for the assets I am creating, for the pace of study for myself, and for the interaction between tutors and students in distance education. I am exploring personal learning spaces, and have been reorganising the, now quite large, collection of assets and materials I am bringing together for the MSc studies. Much of this material will be useful in the long run.

Personal Learning Space

The effort in creating the materials, postings and image assets will outlive the period of study of the MSc. So, the opportunity for the IDEL11 week 6 topic to create a long term personal learning and asset space, as is now being suggested for life long e-Portfolio systems, spurred me to tidy up the web areas I have been using and bring them together. The result is a start made on a new site at http://atate.org/space/ which will give me the opportunity to make sure it can outlive availability of course blogs and systems within the University. Some thing I was already ding with my "Life Wall". All URLs on the site and web pages are relative so the whole site can easily be archived to CD/DVD media or moved to any other hosting platform. This has been my work style since the web started and had let us outlive a number of changes of underlying web delivery technology. I decided also to adopt a new more flexible and easier to render CSS style sheet for the start of this... one that may be useful in future asset rich projects of this kind.

24/7 Tutors and Students

I have remarked to more than one tutor in the last week or two that I think the speed at which they can respond to on-line discussions and queries, even on evenings and weekends, could lead to an expectation on availability which is not sustainable. Its fine when people are enthusiastic and the technology or topic is novel. But the time taken and hours worked is not something the University of or its staff could maintain if more were involved in distance education. The immediacy of social media, the presence indication in many technologies and other aspects make the management of such interaction tricky.

Some of the course design and timetabling encourages this mode of thinking on the part of students and tutors. An example is the IDEL virtual worlds treasure hunt. There was a deadline for entries on Sunday and voting by Sunday midnight! That hardly encourages people to take a break. They need to see the entries and vote and are therefore forced back to their computers late on a Sunday evening. Its not an issue for us as individuals, especially where we have regular computer usage and good communications, but it can encourage a way of thinking and working that did not ought to be sustained for all year, or for tutors, for many years. I would make some simple changes to change the mind set a little... I would set the entries deadline to Sunday evening for those that like to think of Sunday as end of week and make voting be by end of Monday so those who do not work weekends are addressed.

Having said that I got a joint Second Prize in the treasure hunt! Were there more than 3 entries :-)

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 11:55 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 27 October 2011

Reflections on Week 6.2 - The Excitement of New Challenges and Boring Texts

I know that tackling specific projects, especially if they involve collaboration with others, is my preferred style of work and gives me the most motivation. Since my school days projects in my subjects were always the things I enjoyed and are what I remember most about my school days. A study of future transport in cities, a resource gathering and post board display of the products of the industries of the West Riding of Yorkshire, stroboscopic photography of gymnasts, etc.

So I had great fun and put a lot of energy and effort into the ULOE11 Learning Challenge... in which I chose the task of learning an element of the skills of a Junior hairdresser with the support of an expert trainer, Karen Temple, at the salon I normally go to for my haircut.. I probably put in way more than is needed specifically for the course... but I reasoned that that surely was not the only outcome I am seeking by involvement in the MSc. I learned a lot. The more I went into it, the more interesting it became. The specialised tools, brushes and combs were fascinating. I had access to the training manual and even the on-line e-Teaching portal used to support professional qualifications at the QCF or SVQ training level 2. Its also been a fun, and amusing to them, challenge to speak with colleagues, family and friends about. The results are at http://atate.org/mscel/hair/

Solid Blocks of Badly Laid Out Dense Text

But the extreme opposite is the volume of recommended readings on all the MSc courses I am taking to date (IDEL11, ULOE11, EDC11) which are almost all old fashioned academic journal type papers, often really badly laid out 19th Century looking texts where the clearly commercial publishers really make it clear they cannot be bothered. Pages are dense and difficult to scan. Fonts and line spacing make the papers difficult to read. Section titles are squeezed in, references are ludicrously over voluminous to let the authors show off. Summaries are not in an easily scanned and memorised form. I contrast that to something like IEEE Intelligent Systems with its modern type faces and layout, good design, serious editorial assistance, information boxes are used so that the flow of main paper is not broken by side issues, and deliberately limited (i.e. must be worth reading further) references.

IEEE Intelligent Systems is one of the top cited journals in the field of AI, focusing on applied research, and communicating to a general computer sciences readership. It exceeds the quality rating of old fashioned journals such as the long running Elsevier published "Artificial Intelligence Journal" which looks the same now as it did 30 years ago.

Examples of a couple of my own papers in IEEE Intelligent Systems (to eyeball as an indication of style and layout only) are at:

Tate, A., Chen-Burger, Y-H., Dalton, J., Potter, S., Richardson, D., Stader, J., Wickler, G., Bankier, I., Walton, C. and Williams, P.G. (2010) I-Room: A Virtual Space for Intelligent Interaction, IEEE Intelligent Systems, Vol. 25, No. 4, pp 62-71, July-August 2010, IEEE Computer Society.

http://www.aiai.ed.ac.uk/project/ix/documents/2010/2010-ieee-is-tate-iroom-as-published.pdf

Tate, A. (2006) The Helpful Environment: Geographically Dispersed Intelligent Agents That Collaborate, Special Issue on "The Future of AI", IEEE Intelligent Systems, May-June 2006, Vol. 27, No. 3, pp 57-61. IEEE Computer Society.

http://www.aiai.ed.ac.uk/project/ix/documents/2006/2006-ieee-is-tate-helpful-env-as-published.pdf

I raised this to start a discussion in the IDEL11 and ULOE11 WebCT discussion forums. What surprises me is that in an area where modern educational technology and advanced graphics are used, that so few of the very many recommended readings use modern presentation approaches.

Keywords:

4 Comments (+/-)

1. And you've started a very interesting discussion in IDEL - with some differing opinions emerging that I'm finding intriguing. I certainly agree with you about layout; we should have moved on. I can't help feeling that the REF is partly to blame … (just edited a personal rant here – this is your blog!) I do like IEEE layouts and there is no reason why the other journals can't be like this. I ignored your "eyeball" instruction and read the first paper which is of interest to something I'm writing myself. I daren't look at the second as I've told myself it's time to stop reading and get on with it!

   There is a problem for educators when the seminal readings are in such old containers (or new pdf versions of old containers). Your thinking on this is prompting me to wonder what ways round this there might be until our containers evolve. I can think of a few - and there are perhaps more in this programme than in many (it was through the MSc that I encountered TED talks, though I'd probably have come to them eventually). New approaches might need to be "transitional objects" as Glynis Cousin discusses, and as your own I-Room paper also articulates nicely. Ultimately, we shall no doubt have very different containers - including perhaps a range of options. While it's helpful to see depictions of Plato's allegory of the cave in Youtube, I do also like to return to the original text, though not the original Greek! But I might direct a young student to Youtube as a starting point or give them several options. I transposed Plato's *Symposium* (well, a parody of it) to WebCT for my assignment for IDEL five years ago - and this had the effect of making me engage with the text much more deeply than I had ever done as a philosophy student!

   It's Friday afternoon - I'm getting too easily sidetracked! I think what's behind this is that I'd love to hear more of your views on dealing with difficult texts from an educational perspective as well as an aesthetic one. I'm answering it myself by saying "Austin wants them reduced to just the best" and "he'd prefer more projects". I'm probably sympathetic with both of these views, but still think that there are additional implications for universities that are still predominantly sites of text-based practice.

   Christine Sinclair on Friday, 28 October 2011, 15:51 UTC

2. Longer readings are fine when they are interesting :-) But the IDEL11 list of for the current block has 13 readings in it. I would say even for 2 weeks that 2 would suffice (if well chosen) and secondary readings should be reduced to only those necessary. It becomes a marathon otherwise.

   Austin Tate on Friday, 28 October 2011, 16:11 UTC

3. Yes, I don't think Hamish would enjoy my usual graphics rich, bullet style presentations on for example the ULOE11 Learning Challenge. To me the web site at http://atate.org/mscel/hair/ is all I would want to submit. But I am accommodating what I assume is a preference for old style essays. So, I ended up writing a 1,000 word block of solid text to make sure I was not marked down just because of that. I would never give that text to anyone if I wanted to summarise my achievement as a junior hairdresser though :-)

   Austin Tate on Friday, 28 October 2011, 16:18 UTC

4. I am struggling with adding in the comments and editing them. And I keep deleting the wrong one as the delete tag is BELOW an entry not above it. It varies on all the platforms we use of course. So, sorry if you get a stream of e-mails saying comments are added which are no longer here now. I am trying to leave the ones in with spelling corrected!

   Ian Ritchie gave a great TED talk...

   http://www.ted.com/talks/ian_ritchie_the_day_i_turned_down_tim_berners_lee.html

   Austin Tate on Friday, 28 October 2011, 16:26 UTC

Imported at: 05/12/2011 09:31 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 04 November 2011

Reflections on Week 7 - PLEs Please Me

The discussion and readings on institution centric VLEs and personally owned and controlled PLEs, and all things in between, has been useful to draw out some of the argumentation behind the gut feeling I have for personal curation of one's own personal information, data, resources, etc.

Please Me - Personal Means Ownership

It was a natural thing for me to set up a "Personal Learning Environment" in the form of web area and entry web page that brings together a lot of the scattered entry points, summary links pages and shortcuts I have to reach web sites, blogs, discussion forums, WallWisher walls, VLEs, etc for the MSc in e-Learning courses, as well as pointers to my own assignment contributions. Although I created this as part of exploring VLEs vs. PLEs for the IDEL11 course, it has quickly turned into my single point of entry at work, at home and on mobile devices for access to my educational resources and work areas for the MSc. I have refined the style sheets I used to give a simple flexible width style that gives a maximum view of the core content and works well on a range of browsers and devices with large and small (e.g. mobile device) screens. This work space is at http://atate.org/space/.

Freedom to Peek

Since I cannot resist looking ahead, I also have the EDC11 "Post-Human" WallWisher board embedded on my PLE page at present. This is a good example of how a PLE can reflect current focus for an individual learner. A more controlled VLE approach would definitely not have focused something for the following week on its front page.

Moodle as the VLE

In discussion with Jen Ross we agreed that I could utilise Moodle rather than use the personal WebCT scratchpad course creation area we all have for IDEL11. Moodle may be chosen by the University to support distance education, so it is useful to have a better look at it. I set up the Moodle site at http://virtual2.aiai.ed.ac.uk/moodle/ such that Jen Ross, and others on IDEL11 by invitation, could join in as course creators or students. So I was able to do some work on this and blog and comment in the IDEL11 discussion forum about our experience with Moodle and the contrast of that to a PLE, and how the two could work together.

In this IDEL11 block, Moodle was therefore my example of the VLE approach. It let me engage with others on the course in the discussion forum, where it turns out a number of classmates have significant experince of Moodle already. I needed to understand something about Moodle course setup and admin. I am especially interested in quizzes and questionnaires use in Moodle and in the Virtual World classrooms linked to it. I did several Holyrood Park blog entries on the experience of using Moodle and the SLoodle module to connect to a virtual worlds classroom. They also described some of my fighting with the layers of administration settings to get simple things working like student permissions and roles, and to test notifications of course participation messaging. It let me give timely feedback of a number of issues to the SLoodle developers who are near to moving their code for SLoodle for Moodle 2.x from alpha test to beta test level.

I did in fact set up a WebCT course too and put in a few sample resources, and look over the course creation tools, just so I had dipped into that specific platform as well. this could be relevant longer term as the University is about to update WebCT to its "Learn 9" successor for on campus course support.

And Beyond - On Another Planet

I like to plan well ahead, so I have looked across all three MSc courses I am doing this semester, and have started note making and resource building for all the final assessments, and indeed beyond that to the main MSc dissertation. I had some discussions with Hamish MacLeod on a number of these options... and he "helpfully" gave my dozens of new papers and relevant references :-)

I have begun hinting about some experimentation with a concept I am developing for work on "Another Planet". The involve some exploration of an alternative to a linear text essay style by creating a non-linear "Neo-Grammar" that uses a visual and typographical style with hyperlinks to present "Connectors". Nothing concrete yet, but ideas being formed.

Keywords:

1 Comments (+/-)

1. The high-level discussions about VLEs and PLEs on the IDEL board have been very stimulating and provide a good background to your work with Moodle, which I'd like to look at too (if I get the time)! There has been much interesting technical knowledge from the cohort, but also some valuable conceptual ideas such as your own about "personal means ownership". The pedagogical implications of this are likely to be of increasing importance; in fact, I have been surprised to see how much is going on in (some) schools. Looking in on the discussion, I have grown more conscious of the significance of Sian's analysis of smooth and striated spaces and how it has become a useful shorthand to draw attention to the everchanging digital landscapes. "Another planet" (a concept of interest to me) sounds as though you may even be invoking another dimension! (If you will talk to Hamish, you'll inevitably end up with lots of interesting references - but I'm sure you knew that!)

   You're demonstrating here and in your PLE that you practise what you preach about ownership, and provide an excellent exemplar of the use of a web area to bring your many strands together. What you are doing is inspirational – and it also strikes me as the only way you can possibly keep on top of it all!

   Christine Sinclair on Friday, 04 November 2011, 16:01 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 11:56 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 10 November 2011

Reflectons on Week 8 - PLEs and Preparing for Final Assignments

The week has been characterised by some preparatory work for assignments on the three MSc in e-Learning courses I am on. There is a lot to pull together, many interesting areas to explore, and readings to go back over. But I like to start such projects early, do an initial burst of activity to get some material in place, and then take a long time to reflect and refine.

I had originally been considering proposing a project in the area of avatar identity, but decided it overlapped too much with a digital artifact I created for the Digital Cultures course at http://atate.org/ai/ai/ and it would be a pity just to do more of the same.

I have been highly motivated to explore the issues of institutional VLEs (WebCT, Learn 9 and Moodle) and Personal Learning Environments (PLEs) and things in between to support individuals with e-Portfolios of their work but offered by an institution or company (such as PebblePad). I have also been experimenting with Moodle as a VLE platform and talking about that on IDEL11 and beyond. The readings in this area are adding to the knowledge I have of the issues that must be confronted when trying to use VLEs and PLEs. And ways in which they can be more effectively used to support life long learning and asset creation by an individual. So on a suggestion of Jen Ross I looked into the material already blogged and put in discussion forums about this and realized that a lot is being said and that I have a good asset base of screen shots of my explorations and so on to start from to pull threads together. I have proposed that the final assessment for IDEL11 therefore will be in the area of PLEs and the issues surrounding their use.

I am travelling from tomorrow until mid next week, so I am putting in this report a little earlier than usual.

Keywords:

2 Comments (+/-)

1. I do think that this is a good theme to think about, and your expert knowledge will bring a useful dimension. For the purposes of this assignment, it will be important for it to be conceptually grounded as well as technologically sound. I'm wondering whether your reading is suggesting any theoretical perspectives to critique, adopt or adapt around PLEs? Are there any key principles emerging? I'm looking forward to seeing your thinking about this; I think it could be useful for a wider readership too.

   Your approach of getting started early and then taking time to reflect and refine is very appropriate. It provides a fertile environment for future thinking. I think your early start may have come a bit too soon for some of the other students this week, something you've picked up yourself! Because they weren't quite primed for it, the ideas have been difficult to engage with. It must have been a bit frustrating for you - perhaps worth holding off a bit until others have caught up. But it's been a tricky week all round and the results are beginning to shape up; I'm enjoying the debate.

   Happy travels - and look forward to next instalment.

   Christine Sinclair on Friday, 11 November 2011, 09:59 UTC

2. I would say I just have a mish mash of links between the readings and what we are observing in practice. I also looked at the whole discussion thread and will be seeing if themes can be drawn out of that. I am not sure yet if anything coherent will emerge in just a few weeks of study. But at least I am sensitised now to look for things as we go along.

   I got the impression many in the class were REALLY experienced in this area and already had involvement in PLEs, and even some administer VLEs and seek to support PLEs. But I am certainly not wanting to put others off by leaping ahead too far. A week or so away will slow me down anyway ;-) I printed off a few readings as PDF to try to keep on track with that so I still on top of things by end of next week when we change topics again.

   Austin Tate on Friday, 11 November 2011, 10:24 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 11:57 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 16 November 2011

Reflections on Week 9 - The Need for a BIG Table

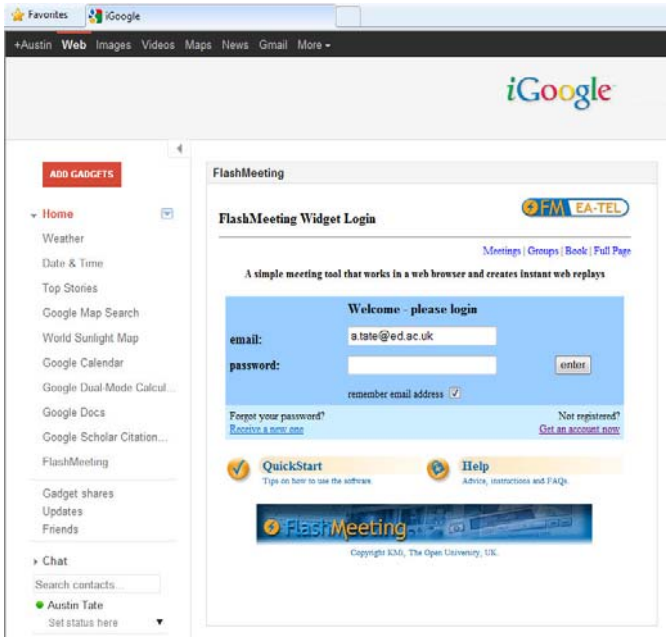
I have been organising my resources for three final course assignments for the MSc. I have outgrown the ring binders I was using to organise things, and finding I want to lay things out more. A large work surface is my answer. I like to have folders and papers in a way I can rapidly access them, look up notes I have written on them, and put them back quickly in a tidy place. A BIG table is the answer. So as I start to prepare notes and outlines of what I might cover in my essays and assignments I have cleared the decks on a whole table to help in this process.

I can see that this study or work pattern reoccurs in much of the work I do, projects I engage in, and assignments I have. Whether the table is real or metaphorical I like to lay out the resources and have them to hand. I like to feel I can get to them and the notes or

markings I make on them. I like to make lists and notes and have them clearly to hand or organised into work folders for the same reason.

I had a travel period during the last week, but had chance to take with me readings for my courses. Lacking broadband and access to an environment where blogging was reasonably well supported, I found I was making more and more notes. Its always funny that a collection of "to do" notes like this always seems to take longer to process afterwards than if you just handle them as you go along. It does make it clear how much time is spent on individual blog entries, or contributions to discussion forums. Something that is not so obvious in a normal working day... until you get home and wonder what you did all day :-)

The work on using a wiki for a class exercise in IDEL11 in the last two weeks has also been interesting. I see this as a bit like the use of Twitter earlier in the course, where we tried to use it for a range of functions, and tried not to use the discussion forum so much. Many of us were pleased to return to a more threaded style of discussion and archived/searchable content. I feel a wiki has some specific uses for community contributed and edited material, but is not suitable for all the functions we are trying to use it for in this exercise. But its useful experience.



I followed up on some suggestions by Jen Ross on learning environments research that had generated widgets that could be pulled into PLEs such as an iGoogle framework, or any web site/page that allowed for embedded frames and widgets. One such site was the Responsive Open Learning Environments (ROLE) at http://www.role-project.eu/. I followed an OU course that introduced ROLE and how to use widgets in a PLE. Following the course practical, I added the "FlashMeeting (FM)" video conference support widget from the ROLE project widget store at http://www.role-widgetstore.eu/ which turned out to be a web browser based conference tool I had used before. I still had the Open University login from the work with them on the Advanced Knowledge Technologies (AKT) and CoAKTinG projects. My recordings of the meetings held then were still in place.

I started to check through Blog entries with a view to ensuring that I had appropriate coverage of my work on PLEs and VLEs for the presentation due in three weeks or so. I found the Search function on the blog is rather poor at finding entries in the blog postings. It seems only to search categories and tags used to label posts, and not look at the full text of the postings, or even the titles. I initially could not find a posting on "PebblePad" for example, which was there when I scanned all my blog posts... which is a poor way to have to find things. I have realised that some of the entries I would like in my presentation are only in the IDEL11 WebCT discussion Forum. So am bringing these and the related screen shots over to the Blog. The separation of all this content into many walled gardens is not really very good. A personal learning environment approach that builds all content in self managed areas, and then lets you combine and use these in mashups as you wish would be better approach.

I have experimented with aggregating all my blogging on HolyRood Park (IDEL11) and the EDEDC WordPress blogs into the Moodle Blog on our experimental site, as that allows such external blog feeds to be aggregated. I have also started to archive the complete set of blog entries at each month end on Holyrood Park and EDC11 Wordpress into my personal learning environment at http://atate.org/space/ as a preservation mechanism.

Keywords:

3 Comments (+/-)

1. Your recognition of your need for a "big table" seems to sit well with your interests for PLEs – and I also wondered whether it relates to your observation in another blog post about maps, and how you can see three dimensions from looking at a map. I am not surprised at your frustration with the "imposed" spaces for their inability to handle data in the way you would like. It does bring home a point about the medium affecting the content that has strong implications for pedagogy in e-learning. I share your frustration at times; if you want to do something but the technology won't "let" you or demands that you find a compromise, there is a sense that it is dictating things. Yet in the process of working through some of these problems, your own assumptions and reasons for doing things in a particular way can become exposed.

   I tried experimenting with the blog to see how the the selection for presentation worked, and then realised I could not emulate your problem because I do not have the level of complexity in my blog entries that you do. And nor do most other students,

though i don't see that as a reason for discouraging complexity! I was disappointed that it didn't take the keywords over into the blog, but I suppose they would be easy enough to reinstate. One thing that revisiting inevitably does, though, is to draw attention to how you have done something and why – and then you start seeing connections (and I can see this happening in your blog).

I was going to conclude by wondering what the PLE means to you, perhaps in terms of suggesting some metaphor, theory or conceptual framework. But then I decided I should leave that to you!

Christine Sinclair on Thursday, 17 November 2011, 14:47 UTC

2. Yes... these things are I am sure very related. I can "see" a whole structure for the presentation I want to do.. and already have an idea of the sections. But I have now realised I cannot use the presentation HP creation/edit tool at all to do this.

   In week 1 of the IDEL11 course I started the final presentation... put in a couple of sections, a text note header on each, and started to populate them. Then when I came to week two to add in the blog entries for that week and revise where I wanted to put them,, I realised how much work would be involved in shifting up parts, or adding a text section introduction to each element. I just deleted the whole lot out as that sort of incremental build style is not what the tool supports.

   I will have to plan it all out on paper BEFORE I start. List every blog entry I want to bring in (and those are not even all available together) and get the order right first time. That's REALLY poor... and not what a tool should encourage. I am used to some tools which let you reorder entire sections or move individual elements really quickly as in the Drupal "books".

   I think many of the educational tools are designed for tiny amounts of content and unsuited to even a single course like IDEL11 let along an entire degree... or more so an entire life's learning experience and work material. People are simply thinking FAR FAR too small scale. PebblePad is an extreme (bad) case, on which I will try to draw out some reasons when I reflect on what is good and bad about VLE and PLE approaches in my IDEL11 assignment essay. My PLE area already has dozens of folders, and almost a thousand images, screenshots, etc. And we are barely 8 weeks into a one year course. Tools need to assume a lifetime of material, and very many attempts to restructure, share, copy, modify, retag, and the use of multiple and concurrent organisational methods over the

Austin Tate on Thursday, 17 November 2011, 15:19 UTC

3. I see that the "Big Space" idea seems to run through a number of my postings... and things I have picked up in the readings. See for example this blog post entitled "Why Large Shared Spaces are Important for Collaboration" from 21st October 2011 relating to comments made by Don Norman (1993):

   http://holyroodpark.net/atate/weblog/6474.html

   Norman (1993) Things that make us smart : defending human attributes in the age of the machine . Reading, Mass., Addison-Wesley Pub. Co. Chapter 6; Distributed Cognition (139 – 154).

Austin Tate on Saturday, 19 November 2011, 10:58 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 11:57 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 25 November 2011

Reflections on Week 10 - Presence and Voice

Indications of Presence in Virtual Worlds

The theme of the readings and Second Life sessions this week was to explore the notion of presence, and mechanism for achieve a sense of community and proper interchange leading to menaingful learning in in distance educational contexts. I have liked the earlier IDEL11 readings from Warburton (2009) which provides a table with a rich variety of sync and async communications and presence indication methods, as well as listing some of the issues for usability of virtual worlds like Second Life for education and collaboration.

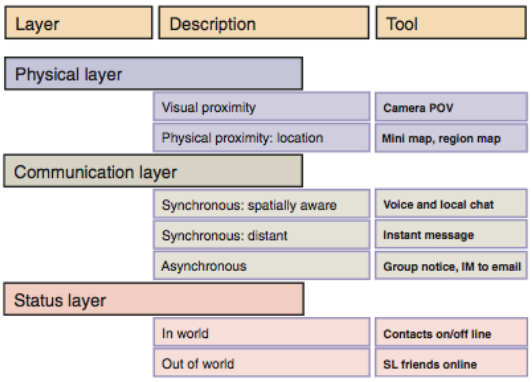

Figure 1: Presence layers in Second Life (SL). *Presence, according to Yee et al (2007), measures how real one believes a mediated environment is, in terms of non-verbal behaviours (Garau, Slater, Bee & Sasse, 2001), physiological responses (Slater, Usoh & Steed, 1994) and other measures. In the diagram, three separate presence layers are identified for SL. The physical presence layer is composed of a visual element, where avatars can see each other through the default camera point of view (POV)—the main window on the 3-D setting—and a geographic element, where the location of other avatars in-world can be tracked using the in-world 2-D maps. Physical proximity also allows avatars in-world to see physical gestures, poses and animations. The communication layer offers several channels for interaction from synchronous voice and instant messaging (IM) to asynchronous mechanisms, such as an in-world group notification system and the connection of IM to an email account. The status layer provides minimal information about in-world presence indicating when avatars are logged into SL*

Darabi et al. (2010) started off by commenting that some types of online learning have been considered deficient in providing the social interaction needed for the construction and development of knowledge. They described experiments to examine various modes of interaction using discussion forums and the like. I was surprised at the basis for these arguments, as I think that much "face-to-face" teaching often exclude many of the learners except perhaps in very small tutorial style classes, which are not by any means common place at all levels of education. I feel that online learning techniques with the rich set of synchronous and asynchronous communications mechanisms can be a facilitator for better communication in a class and account for individual learner styles and preferences as well. These methods might even improve on-campus course interactions if properly integrated with a course.

Voice in Second Life

This week for the first time on IDEL11 we used voice in Second Life. Everyone seemed to get set up and active very quickly, which is not often the case. Technically voice on teleconference systems is one of the biggest issues I come across in distance collaboration, whether for new or experienced users. Voice always seems very natural to me in these teleconference style meetings. I quickly forget my avatar and controlling it and concentrate on the subject and discussion topic to hand. But this could be because I have many years of experience of using a range of teleconference systems with and without video, and with people I know and new communities. Some classmates found the experience odd as it was their first use of voice associated with an avatar, and hearing voice as if from other people's sometime "fantastical" avatar identities.

Uncanny Pedagogical Experiences - Joking Apart

I have kidded on a bit with Siân Bayne in some discussions over the use of what I treated as "cute" terms like the "uncanny" and "ghostly" or "zombie" experiences. I got the idea of the uncertain and mind challenging environments she was described as a learning opportunity. But the Bayne (2008) reading did start to make more sense to me as a coherent approach to some people's experiences in virtual worlds. I think I have used teleconference, distance collaboration and other forms of multi-user environments for so long, and have had experience of MUDs and MOOs as they grew from their text beginnings, so that its a more natural experience for me... just like I would not call using the telephone uncanny because I can heard a disembodied voice from a distance. But I can certainly put myself into an avatar shape or type which I know I find unusual or that feels "wrong".

I found a very nicely constructed site in Second Life this week which allowed for just such an experience, and I blogged about it to draw it to the attention of others on the IDEL11 and EDEDC courses. See "Meta Body - Try an Out of Your Body Experience" - http://holyroodpark.net/atate/weblog/6776.html

IDEL11 Essay Focus

In the last week, I found I was struggling with the work I have done to date on the IDEL11 essay. I have a lot of observations and links to the literature... and many more items I now want to read back over having thought about things more. But I like to have a stronger outline or theme in mind when I am working on a paper like this... and I lack that focal point just now. But I think I might have a suitable hook.

I had earlier tried to describe some of the collaboration tools needed to support distributed collaboration in some communities I work with, to distill the experience we have with "Web 2.0" style tools for those communities, in a way I could input to the Distance Education Initiative (DEI) as it chooses tools for the University of Edinburgh. If I see the DEI steering group as one focus for what I am trying to relay about VLEs, PLEs and the sorts of collaboration tools needed, and why they differ between institutionally provided elements and personal asset management areas that might focus my thinking. I am trying that out.

References

Bayne, Siân (2008) "Uncanny spaces for higher education: teaching and learning in virtual worlds", ALT-J Research in Learning Technology, Vol. 16, No. 3., pp.197-205.

Darabi, A. et al. (2011) "Cognitive presence in asynchronous online learning: a comparison of four discussion strategies", Journal of Computer Assisted Learning, 27(3): 216-227.

Warbuton, S. (2009) "Second Life in higher education - Assessing the potential for and the barriers to deploying virtual worlds in learning and teaching", British Journal of Educational Technology, 40(3), 414-426.

Keywords:

2 Comments (+/-)

1. Lots of good stuff here, Austin. Warburton's table is particularly useful in relation to this week's discussion about presence. Your argument against deficiencies in interactions was well supported by your own "scaffolding" of fellow students (and tutors) in our Second Life voice discussion. You showed by example (and occasionally by explicit comment) that a mix of synchronous and asynchronous techniques provides a rich resource that is not available in the traditional classroom (though, as you say, it could be!)

   Warburton's table might arguably also be used to highlight personal preferences and capabilities. Students who have strong spatial awareness (such as yourself) will adapt quickly to the tools that provide a sense of visual and aural proximity. You possibly sought such affordances out early on. By now, these communications are second nature to you; for others, they have to be consciously activated each time, and that provides an extra layer of work. You clearly recognise this, and you are open to thinking about the implications as theorised by writers such as Siân. There has been evidence on the discussion board of direct experience in your fellow students of this sense of the uncanny.

   I was myself one of those students who found Second Life weird - unexpectedly, as I thought I would love it. The uncanniness has been welcome, though, in stimulating thinking about communication, differences, identity... lots of things. The range of responses to avatars is fascinating - for instance, your own observation about "controlling" your avatar. Avatars seem to be variously seen as puppets, extensions, masks, dolls, corpses, children - and many other metaphors. (I'm conscious of wanting to prod mine if she falls asleep, for instance!) Students have to be willing to live with the weirdness and work through it to get the benefits of that cognitive discomfort. Your experiments with avatars have been a delight and you have also provided some intriguing links. I nearly went off to have a look at the out-of-body experience (I noted it when you first posted it) but I've had to save it as a treat for when I've read all the blogs! This is the first time I've been tempted to go into SL as a treat or to play.

   Your assignment plans sound good - from your earlier entries it appears that you are making a case for adequate or indeed BIG spaces. The combination of your existing knowledge and your situated understanding of the student experience could be invaluable for the DEI. The thinking for the academic assignment could thus be useful for an input to that process, though you might end up with more than one document because of the different genres.

Christine Sinclair on Sunday, 27 November 2011, 10:53 UTC

2. Thanks for that very positive feedback Christine.

   I liked you comments about "poking" your avatar if she falls asleep. I know what you mean. a furious shake of the mouse does give them a jolt. I use an anti-idler which means Ai is always alert :-) And a smile attachment so he always looks happy. Be has a face light so she looks bright and cheery even in gloomy areas.

   You make a very interesting observation about being able to "tag" mechanisms that an individual comes to prefer related to communication methods and presence indicators. That's indeed could be useful for all sorts of reasons as you say. I don't like the type ahead indication to other users for example (as I frequently do a lot of pre-typing, cut and paste in my text chats and IMs), so I disable that in the debug settings of the viewer.

   You will find the "Meta-Body" region interesting if you explore for half an hour. If you take the tour via touching the black sphere next to the lady in white playing the piano, make sure your animation overrider is turned off if you have one attached... and set the camera back a bit perhaps and just sit back and enjoy the trip. Make sure you try the various avatars in the sky area. They are all free, and elements of them will be very reusable.

   For the assignment, I do have a problem that their are too many bits and pieces. It could look more like a scrapbook than an essay! I have already decided one more detailed part really cannot be in the "flow" of the story I want to tell. But I may add the notes as an appendix (to not be in the word count) as it seems to be something that I could come back to when I have more time.

Austin Tate on Sunday, 27 November 2011, 11:59 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 11:58 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 02 December 2011

Reflections on Week 11 - Work Style and Why Silence is (could be) Golden

Work Style and Tool Wrangling

My work style means I make a lot of notes on deliverables, sometimes far ahead of due dates. Sometimes, even on even multi-year projects, I have an outline of every deliverable on day 1 of the project. They are usually just section titles or deliverable due dates and formal reference numbers, etc. But once that outline is there I am much more relaxed. Its almost as if after that you just have "to fill things in" even where months or work might be required to do that. Then as I go along I write some sections completely and in depth. For other things I add bullets as I progress. I frequently add the screen shots and other imagery along the way. This is another aspects of my "Big Space" approach which I have blogged about before. Its as if the whole project was there and I can dip in, do bits out of temporal order, and refine things as we go along. I never like to feel I am up against a deadline and facing a "white page" problem. Until I have a hook or story line for open ended deliverables - like the IDEL11 essay - I feel much less comfortable.

I have noticed that my style of working is not well supported by the way that the Elgg blog for IDEL11 works.. something Christine and myself discussed earlier when some of my weekly IDEL11 reflection postings seemed to be out of order. You can make a draft entry and just publish it as private to yourself... and later after its complete publish it to a group or fully publicly. But when finally posted beyond yourself it retain its very first date and time. That can be far removed from when you meant it to appear in a temporally ordered blog, and causes confusion. The RSS feeds of the event also show up at the earlier date meaning they are missed by all readers. It took me a while to even realise they were present, just far back in an event stream timeline. Wordpress blogs as used on Digital Cultures works much better in this respect as you can create and manage drafts as you refine them, including all their embedded media. And then when ready publish them to the intended audience. It's that date of publish which gets attached to the post and is used in RSS feeds.

Deep Immersion, Eureka Moments, and "Coming Together" Experiences

In the readings in the last few weeks, I liked the description in Levy (2009, page 244) about the feelings that Barbara McClintock had when studying corn... and how she was deeply immersed in the world of corn when performing her molecular biological studies. She had flashes of insight in which she saw a pattern or result, even though much more work was then needed to show that it was so.

Christine in an IDEL11 Discussion Forum post mentioned a "coming together" moment Peter Higgs described are very powerful and often do need some focus and concentration on an area.

> Peter Higgs, of Higgs-Boson fame, and an emeritus professor at the University of Edinburgh described his theoretical discovery in 1964. (Extract from BBC News article, 10 September, 2008.) It happened over a weekend.

I have an example from a while ago when doing some complex 3D shape modelling and I was trying to work things by the numbers with mental 3D algebra and loads of notes..... but in a moment things sort of swam before my eyes and the shapes made sense as an imagined 3D envelope in my mind's eye was almost swirling round to see from various angles. It was quite vivid and I started to develop the actual formulae with that image still alive. But just then a family member came in to ask a question and the whole thing melted away. It took me ages to do the task after that and I never got the vision back.

Silence is (or could be) Golden

I am thinking of ways to get some quiet time to begin serious work on my IDEL11 Essay... and I am thinking of dropping out of watching my twitter time line for a period. The constant interruptions of immediate status updates and the lure of irresistible and interesting looking pointers to other material are very time consuming and distracting when really trying to focus, read and extract meaningful insights.

I notice that I was tetchy on the morning when the IDEL11 Adobe Connect session was on. I was annoyed with myself for failing to do any of a planned set of readings on VLEs and PLEs to add to the themes in my IDEL11 essay in the previous day or two, even though that had been my plan. Constrant interruptions and hard work to set up a new portal for the OpenVCE group on the APAN network (see http://openvce.net/apan) had meant I failed to get on with any planned task in that period. So another 2 or 3 hours disrupted felt bad... but I realised it was just that I knew I was not achieving my own targets for reading and seeking essay inputs.

One of this week's readings by Charlie Brooker in the Guardian on the demands and "force feed" aspects of new instant messaging techniques made me smile (or groan) as I know this feeling all too well.

Unfortunately, this coincides with a really serious virus/trojan infection on my main desktop computer... which occurred on Friday after a visit to an education blog which had a guest post that must have had malware in it and clearly infected my machine. It was a very deeply installed and persistent boot sector trojan which made a real mess. I am still not back in good shape yet.

References

Brooker, C. (2010). Google Instant is Trying to Kill Me. The Guardian, 13 September 2010.

Levy, D. (2007). No time to think: Reflections on information technology and contemplative scholarship.

Keywords:

2 Comments (+/-)

1. Interesting sequencing here as bits come together - illustrating your point about the frustrating (though sometimes useful) ways some technologies will sequence and date-stamp what you are doing. Your reflections are making me think about the care I need to take in recognising what it is I am "marking" – it's a combination of a final product and a process, though with more emphasis perhaps on the former than there was during my IDEL student days.

You were entitled to feel tetchy in the Adobe Connect session (though it didn't particularly come across that way). There were some fundamental problems, mainly caused by my inadequate preparation for participation (based on a number of very wrong assumptions, especially the one where I thought I *had* prepared!) My apologies for that; it's not the way I prefer to make points about teaching and learning! You made some astute observations about the time spent getting ready for and participating in such an event, including the opportunity costs of getting on with some necessary reading. I have often felt this way during synchronous events such as lectures and meetings; I look forward to getting back to the asynchronous "sanctuary" of reading and writing. For others, though, the immediacy of the synchronous is more important. Our aim in this course is to look at such spaces critically and consider how they could be used - I have been interested to see some students using Adobe Connect for "learning events" in the Course Design module.

So lots in this entry about the uses of time and what gets in the way - including viruses (sounds a particularly nasty one) - and getting back the precious train of thought after interruptions. Your hooks and storylines in your big spaces seem to work well to keep you on top of it all, and then when you have to work within an incompatible environment (such as this one) that adds to the frustration. I do recognise some of these frustrations as a potential grain of sand in the oyster - if everything works too smoothly, then those flashes or slower shapings perhaps don't get the opportunity to emerge.

Christine Sinclair on Friday, 02 December 2011, 13:16 UTC

2. The tetchy feeling was entirely due to frustration at myself for not knuckling down to the reading in spite of concurrent activities... and my usual desire to get hooks and story line set up well in advanced of actual deadlines.

Austin Tate on Friday, 02 December 2011, 14:14 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 14:16 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Other Observations

Other Observations

This section collects together blog posts on IDEL11 readings, observations on using educatyional technology and collaboration tools on the course, and inputs not otherwise covered in my week-by-week "reflections" postings.

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Blog post: 05 October 2011

(Lack) Of Ideas and (Insufficient) Data

Where shall we to begin to unravel the drivel in the paper by Roszak. Let's start with his use of language... humans have minds and think... with no "quotes" on the words. Computers are "data processors" which "regurgitate" from "memory" with heavy use of quotes. Their proponents are "data merchants" - you can almost hear him spit as he says it - and they promulgate a "cult of information" - my quotes. Human memory is the "invisible psychic adhesive" - give me a break.

Then we get pages on "ideas" which humans "think" about, and how those differ from what "computers" can "process" - and Rosak helpfully explains that these are generalization mechanisms based on experience of more or fewer instances. Pity he seems to not know about explanation based generalization systems in computers which have worked for many years to find and refine categories in the taxonomies in many knowledge-based systems, and then used to great effect to advance scientific knowledge in astronomy, genetics and drug discovery. These systems have been around for well over three decades, so if he was speaking about generalisation, you think he could have looked it up (suggested keywords: "computer" "AI" "generalization"). But then again perhaps (neo-)luddites cannot do proper research if it involves using computers.His poor use of the Logo Poetry generator program, which included an element to ensure some randomizing phrases and vocabulary was introduced into the generated poems, was introduced as his example to illustrate the level of computer "simulation" of human "originality". This really is such a poorly related example I could not believe it got through peer review even in a philosophy paper.

He begins to go off into the void with references to the self reflection and how the mind is such a wonderful thing because it cannot fully model itself... but can (of course) completely understand its own creations. He asserts that it is "impossible to invent a machine that will be the mind's equal". Well maybe we can try to go for "mind" rather than mind and we might succeed. He does like his "quotes".

Roszak, T., (1994) "Of Ideas and Data" from Roszak, T., The cult of information : a neo-Luddite treatise on high tech, artificial intelligence, and the true art of thinking pp.87-107, University of California Press.

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:03 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 13 October 2011

Done, but with errors on page!

Browser incompatibility with served web pages and web content has been an issue for some time since multiple browsers and platforms have become available. HTML itself was designed to allow for multiple possible renderings to allow for differences of display device, etc. But as web pages have used proprietary content (e.g. Flash) and used progressively more complex scripting (e.g. JavaScript), style sheet variants (e.g. CSS) and other platform dependant content, and as specialized versions of web pages for mobile devices have appeared, the things have recently become much worse.

We often get pages partially rendered, but see the message "Done, but with errors on page" showing in the browser status bar. This is often due to JavaScript or other underling errors... an example, taken from the Holyrood Park Blog site itself, might look like this if you open the diagnostics window...

> User Agent: Mozilla/4.0 (compatible; MSIE 8.0; Windows NT 6.0; Trident/4.0; chromeframe; SLCC1; .NET CLR 2.0.50727; Media Center PC 5.0; InfoPath.1; .NET CLR 1.1.4322; .NET CLR 3.5.30729; .NET CLR 3.0.30729; .NET4.0C)
> Timestamp: Mon, 10 Oct 2011 19:18:06 UTC
>
> Message: Object expected
> Line: 2 Char: 1 Code: 0
> URI: http://edc11.education.ed.ac.uk/.../northern-web-coders/js/dropmenu.js

A serious problem is that pages are getting richer in content, but page developers are failing to test in multiple browsers, consider different bandwidth devices, different size screen failing to provide fall back styles where they sue advanced facilities, etc.

White Screen of Death by waiting...

Another issue is that page developers, and most content management systems and social network style web pages are laid out in ways that mean the page does not render until most of the content has been downloaded to the browser. Where the page contains many thumbnails, images, and other large volume content this can mean the user sees a blank screen for a long time on slower links before the whole page is shown. Progressive rendering of downloaded content is not possible if the style typical of social network web pages is adopted. The developers of those web pages and styles often fail to set image and table/element pre-size indicators which means the content has to be loaded before the browser can decide on the layout position.

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:04 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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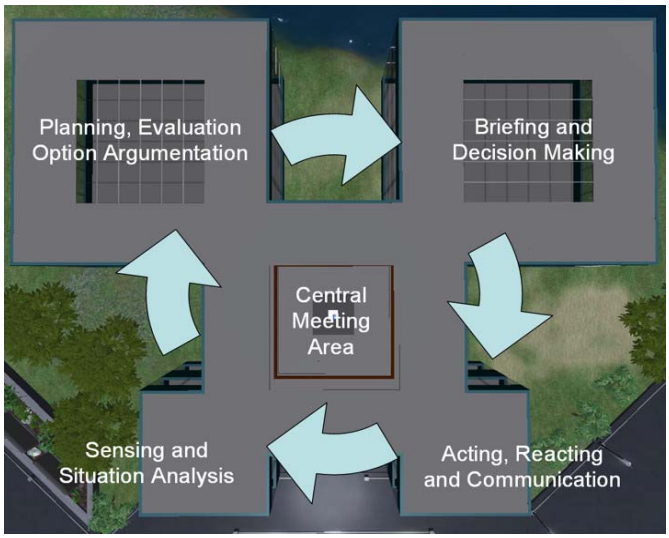
Blog post: 21 October 2011

Why Large Shared Spaces are Important for Collaboration

I am reading some papers by Don Norman, and one on "Distributed Cognition" (Norman, 1993) makes some very nice points about the value of large situation rooms and operations centres for providing a joint view of the current situation and actions being taken in complex environments such as power station control rooms and emergency response centres. I have been in such centres for real and training situations, for natural disaster response in Tokyo, for a nuclear power station in the UK and for search and rescue coordination in the UK and the USA. They are all set up to allow for people to gather round or have a view of screens and see information in a shared environment.. the operators and responders are not all looking at their own screen separately... though of course they do that to use specialised tools, information and communications which they bring to the shared space.

In our work we have sought to replicate this sort of shared situation space, as a basis for human centric decision support. When we started to embody our technology in virtual worlds we wanted to replicate some of the benefits of this, and indeed provide a shared space for distributed participants, as is often the need in complex multinational emergencies. We are sometimes asked why we want to replicate rooms with walls when we are in virtual worlds, and I respond that we want the wall space for displays and distinct functional areas that everyone can remember and use.



In our I-Rooms (http://openvce.net/iroom) we have a shared central space in which participants gather and communicate, and from which viewpoint they can direct their attention to any of four functional areas set in a cyclic pattern to allow for situation assessment, option exploration, briefing and external communications. It supports the OODA Loop (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/OODA_loop) as an underlying approach and lets us place human and intelligent systems support into a meaningful whole which all the participants can involve themselves in as appropriate.

Reference: Norman (1993) Things that make us smart : defending human attributes in the age of the machine . Reading, Mass., Addison-Wesley Pub. Co. Chapter 6; Distributed Cognition (139 – 154).

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:08 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 16 November 2011

Link Ahead - Synchronous and Asynchronous Elements for Collaboration - Landow and Heywood

Landow (2006, pp 284-285) gives a very nice example of the effect of using Hypermedia alongside Peter Heywood's usual weekly topic based course on cell plant biology. He observed that students could follow links ahead into later materials, versus being over constrained by the current topics and resources to hand. This encouraged them to make links between items in the course, and look for more interesting opportunities to them as individuals for discussions and assignment topics. The wiki and hypertext elements added to the traditional weekly format course made possible a way for the class to work asynchronously, we well as to maintain class focus based on the weekly content and milestones.

I have come across this also in my use of Moodle along side the OpenVCE.net community portal (for asynchronous community support) and meeting spaces in Second Life, Adobe Connect or Skype (for synchronous meetings of the community). We wanted to have both elements of a cross course community resource area and a topic or time tabled element. We did this by having a standing OpenVCE community "course" using Moodle's "social" format, and also a "topic" or "weekly".

I would observe that in some studies we have done of communities who engage in distributed collaboration (Hansberger et al., 2010) we find that the types of functions they wish to perform together leads to a set fop requirements for both synchronous and asynchronous interactions, which can be facilitated by different tools.

Hansberger, J.T., Tate, A., Moon, B. and Cross, R., Cognitively Engineering a Virtual Collaboration Environment for Crisis Response, Proceedings of the 2010 ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Working. (CSCW 2010), Savannah, Georgia, USA, 6-10 February 2010.

Landow, George P., (2006) "Reconfiguring literary education" from Landow, George P., Hypertext 3.0: critical theory and new media in an Era of Globalization pp.278-291,302-309, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:12 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Virtual Worlds and Avatar Identity

Virtual Worlds and Avatar Identity

This section collects tiogether the various postings I made about the use of virtual worlds on the course and some IDEL11 tutorial meetings held on the Vue South regiion in Second Life. It also shows somwe of the developments that I created to explore "Avatar Identity" and "Other Worlds".

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Blog post: 22 October 2011

A Brief History of Virtual Collaboration

To add to some of the history of MUD/MOO/MUVEs given by Warburton (2009), I will add here an information panel from one of my papers in IEEE Intelligent Systems (Tate et al., 2010) as it shows the history is not rooted only in game interests.

> Tate, A., Chen-Burger, Y-H., Dalton, J., Potter, S., Richardson, D., Stader, J., Wickler, G., Bankier, I., Walton, C. and Williams, P.G. (2010) I-Room: A Virtual Space for Intelligent Interaction, IEEE Intelligent Systems, Vol. 25, No. 4, pp 62-71, July-August 2010, IEEE Computer Society. http://www.aiai.ed.ac.uk/project/ix/documents/2010/2010-ieee-is-tate-iroom-as-published.pdf

A Brief History of Virtual Collaboration

While strongly influenced in recent years by advances in computer game technology, the origins of virtual worlds and their social networking aspects can be traced to research into multi-user persistent spaces that began in the late 1970s and explored object sharing and chat for collaborative systems, especially in the field of artificial intelligence. Adding object oriented programming to script or control the objects in the shared space expanded the possibilities. Dating from 1990, LambdaMOO (http://lambdamoo.info/) is one well known example of this type of multiuser, object-oriented virtual space.

Work in this area has continued, with the environments now being used alongside teleconferencing, videoconferencing, and instant messaging with agent presence and status information. A good example is the Collaborative Virtual Workspace (http://cvw.sourceforge.net/), originally built by MITRE between 1994 and 1999, that used a buildings-and-rooms metaphor for persistent storage of the documents and shared assets used in collaborations. Many videoconference support systems use the idea of setting up a virtual workspace "room" to give context to a particular presentation or meeting.

The foundations of the I-Room project, within the context of the wider I-X Research Program, lie in extensions to this idea to make use of intelligent planning and collaboration aids alongside CVW. These represent just a handful of the proposals that have appeared over the last decade that describe a room for intelligent team-based interaction or a room that could itself act as a knowledge-based asset for a group. Some of these concepts were explored in the Collaborative Advanced Knowledge Technologies in the Grid (CoAKTinG) project.

References

- R.A. Bartle, “Early MUD History,”1990; http://www.mud.co.uk/richard/mudhist.htm
- S. Buckingham Shum et al., “CoAKTinG: Collaborative Advanced Knowledge Technologies in the Grid,” Proc. 2nd Workshop Advanced Collaborative Environments, Advanced Knowledge Technologies (AKT), 2002; http://www.aktors.org/coakting/
- Warbuton, S. (2009). Second Life in higher education" Assessing the potential for and the barriers to deploying virtual worlds in learning and teaching. British Journal of Educational Technology, 40(3), 414-426.

I very much like the persistence aspect of Second Life/OpenSim and other virtual worlds meeting spaces/classrooms/operations centres. I don't think this is captured at all by teleconference and video teleconferencing systems on their own, and even Adobe Connect with its resources, chat room and app sharing, etc. Though some systems like Mitre's CVW did set up the rooms/buildings metaphor for that persistence of shared resources while layering video teleconferencing on top. CVW was used heavily by the US military for their distributed ops centres teleconferening. It also included IMPs.

So, to add to this note, I would specifically draw your attention to the Mitre CVW idea of IMPs (Intelligent Multimodal Participants) that could reside in CVW functional "rooms" to monitor activity, give assistance in the room, or relay information to users whose attention was elsewhere.

Reference:

Michael Krutsch (1999) "IMPs Enhance Virtual Collaboration Enmvironments", The Edge, Mitre Corporation, Intelligent Human-Computer Interface, December 1999, Volume 3 Number 4.

http://www.mitre.org/news/the_edge/december_99/fourth.html

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:16 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 10 October 2011

Avatar Identity

Its tricky to know which is the "real" avatar...

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:17 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 09 October 2011

Avatar to Avatar Chat

My two OpenSim avatars chatting away together. Part of an exercise for the Digital Cultures EDC11 Digital Artifact exercise: http://atate.org/ai/ai/res/2011-10-09-chat-log-ai-and-be.txt

At least they don't bicker like some recent chatbot to chatbot chat experiments: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WnzlbyTZsQY

Keywords:

2 Comments (+/-)

1. I enjoyed this slightly edgy discussion - and wonder which one of them would make the stronger claim for identity with you!

Christine Sinclair on Wednesday, 12 October 2011, 10:44 UTC

2. Thats easy... Ai is the only one I have provided some teaching to on topics he has been asked about before. And, when talking to Be, he still complains that I have not informed him about my opinions on matters he was chatting about!

Austin Tate on Wednesday, 12 October 2011, 10:49 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:18 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 17 October 2011

Avatar Indentity - me, us or them?

Avatar Identity exercise - are the avatar clones me, us or them? See http://atate.org/ai/ai/ for more...

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:18 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 11 October 2011

Exploration of EduNation Region in Second Life

This is a mixed use and mixed institution educational area, with a number of plots used by a range of Universities, coverages and academic groups. There are a number of "classrooms in the sky" on various levels.

- http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/EduNation/219/231/74 (Castle to Overlook the Region)
- http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/EduNation%20III/136/127/900 (High Dive Platform)

On arrival and initial exploration, the area is not well described or signposted. There is no obvious entry/arrival area and no note cards are offered. Looking round though it was clear there were specific institution and class areas set up for specific subjects. A veterinary studies area had sculptures of horses, and posters and displays related to horse anatomy for example. It had some nice teaching and presentation aids. There was a nice interactive "Artboard 2.1" using prims for marked lines.

To find out more about the area and its uses, a Google search on "EduNation Second Life" leads to http://heyjude.wordpress.com/2007/02/05/edunation-secondlife/ which has next to no content and no one has posted comments... it's full contents are:

The Consultants-E are proud to launch the first private island simulator in Second Life dedicated to online training seminars and conferences, and the use of Second Life in Education. EduNation is a 65,000m2 island in the Second Life virtual world with seminar, powerpoint, audio and videocast facilities. Use of the seminar facilities is free. More information at EduNation (http://www.theconsultants-e.com/edunation/edunation.asp)

That URL leads only to "Server Error - 404 - File or directory not found. The resource you are looking for might have been removed, had its name changed, or is temporarily unavailable.

This is rather typical of educational regions that are not well managed or owned by specific stake-holders. The area should be considered as one that lets people set up individual classrooms and areas and is not meant to have a cohesive design or allow for random exploration and discovery.

A good example of it in productive use by educators, and the reason I chose this region to explore, was a recent demonstration of a new version of the SLoodle module for the Moodle Victual Learning Environment. The demonstration organisers set up a new area well up in the sky and rafter landing at a simple initial meeting space, they dynamically rezzed large platforms nearby to show the facilities. and even rezzed a bridge to let the visitors walk over to that newly created facility. I attended a briefing about the new SLoodle 2 toolset on the EduNation III region of Second Life on Sunday 18-Sep-2011 by Paul Priebsch (avatar name: Fire Centaur). About 30 other educators were there. A feature of SLoodle 2 is the ability to set up "scenes" an rapidly rezz them in and around a classroom for a lesson, and then tidy them away so the ability can be re-used. This was demonstrated live on the EduNation regions. The SLoodle quiz chair can be set up to give rewards to students, or "penalise" them for failure... including dumping them in a shark filled pool with realistic screams!

A blog report of that demonstration is at http://holyroodpark.net/atate/weblog/6149.html. Full size versions of some images of the demo meeting are gathered at http://openvce.net/sloodle

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:19 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 11 October 2011

IDEL11 Second Life Introductory Tutorial

MSc in e-Learning IDEL11 Module - Virtual Worlds in Education section... tutorial for new avatars and to get used to the facilities on Virtual University of Edinburgh (Vue) given by Frank Lassard and Pancha Enzyme...

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:19 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 12 October 2011

IDEL11 Tutorial on Warburton 2009

Attended tutorial on Holyrood Park in "The Grove" campfire tutorial space on Vue facilities in Second Life. This is Ai arriving from above looking down over the Vue regions, and then in the meeting.

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:20 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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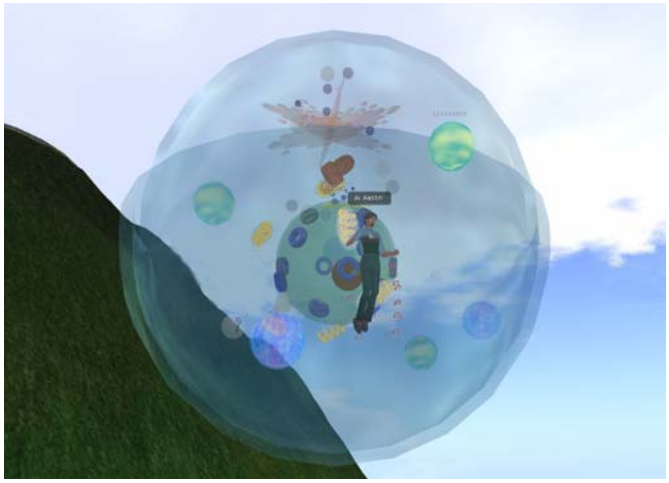
Blog post: 18 October 2011

On the Treasure Hunt... Roots of Life...



Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:20 UTC
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Blog post: 20 October 2011

On the Treasure Hunt... Roots of Life... Take 2

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:21 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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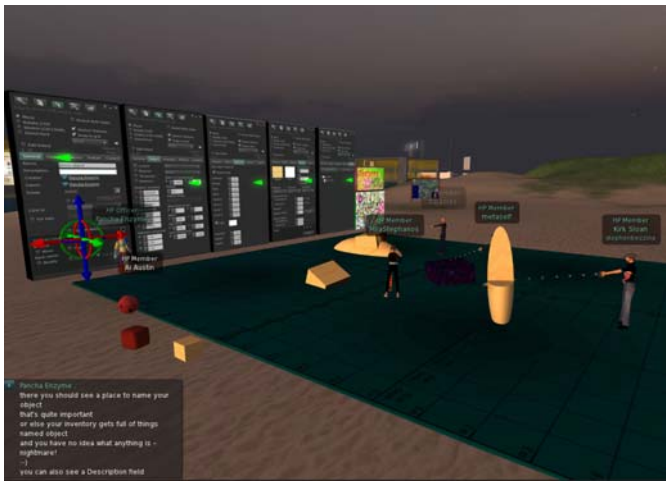
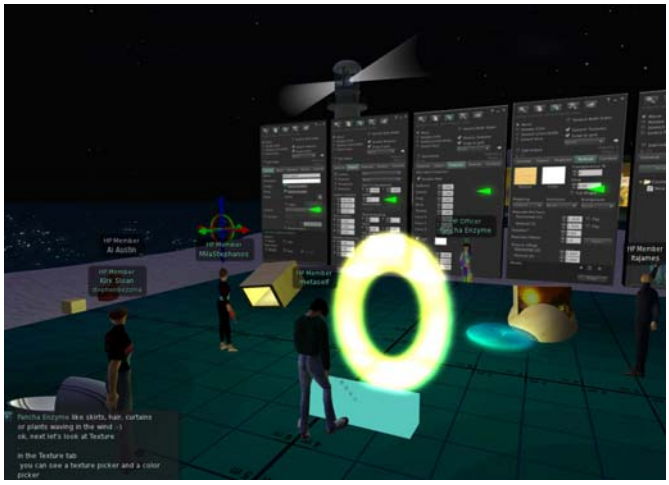
Blog post: 17 October 2011

Second Life Building Tutorial





Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:22 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 19 October 2011

Austin, Ai and the Personal Satellite Assistant

Reading Boellstorff (2008) and his stories of virtual world encounters.... I have some related observations. This may get a bit deep and multi-layered.. I like layers of storytelling and meaning :-)

Some of you may (or may not) have noticed that my avatar changed appearance during the Second Life building tutorial this week. My normal bearded avatar and flight suit outfit (there is a whole history behind that too) .. changed to be a little red round ball. Why?

When "I" (Austin) am "he" (Ai) he normally shows attention and is responsive to what is happening around. I do not like "busy" and "afk" indicators and prefer to log out - or go elsewhere in world. I am not happy to leave my avatar unattended and feel it would be rude to do so... though I have no problem with others adopting that style of use of virtual worlds.

For a few years I used some text only and mobile device or low bandwidth non-graphical clients like Radegast and iPad's Pocket Metaverse. I was always unhappy that I had no idea what my avatar would look like, how it would be positioned, that it might face wrongly to those I interacted with, and it was difficult to make the avatar appear such that it was clear I was on a text chat/IM only client.

So I put some effort into designing an avatar that reflected this state of affairs. This was a Personal Satellite Assistant (PSA)... a real device NASA is working on for the Space Station that uses AI technology. It acts as an assistant to relay messages, give instructions and help, and record via camera things going on in experiments in the Space Station. It hovers near astronauts to help them, or can be sent to perform tasks. It has a screen on its front to show astronauts images, video, messages, etc. I have explicit permission from NASA Ames Research Lab to use the image of the skin of this device in my work and in virtual worlds .

I have used a sphere with this PSA skin for a number of AI driven and autonomous devices in Second Life for several years. Enter any I -Room (http://openvce.net/iroom) and there will usually be one at the entrance to act as a greeter or sensor sending back visitor and status information to our intelligent system over the web.

So I created the Ai PSA Avatar with the PSA shape, size and skin, and showed on the screen a portrait image of "Ai" to show its him that is watching as if over a video teleconference link - i.e. not immersive and "in world" fully.

Even though not on a low bandwidth or text client at the SL building tutorial, my attention was elsewhere. In fact my camera was not even in the same region as the tutorial space. I was looking at an object in a distant region that had the properties I wanted to copy to replicate a complex object I did not know how to build. But I did not feel comfortable just leaving "Ai" unattended... and did not want to fly away to get the information. I have the same issue when I am looking at web pages, or using other applications alongside the Second Life viewer. This was a case when it felt exactly right to use the Ai PSA avatar.

I see this as "Ai" looking through the "PSA" robot floating in the meeting space... "I" am behind "Ai" but its "Ai" that is disconnected from the meeting space.

Boellstorff, T. (2008). Personhood. In Coming of Age in Second Life (pp. 118-150). Oxford: Princeton University Press.

[First posted on IDEL11 Discussion Forum, 19-Oct-2011]

Keywords:

1 Comments (+/-)

1. This is very much like the "IMPs" (Intelligent Multimodal Participants) (Krutsch, 1999) in the Mitre (now open source) Collaborative Virtual Workspace (CVW), something we worked with on a DARPA project around that time.

   Krutsch, Michael (1999) "IMPs Enhance Virtual Collaboration Envirionments", Intelligent Human-Computer Interface Issue, The Edge, Vol. 3, No. 4., December 1999. http://www.mitre.org/news/the_edge/december_99/fourth.html

Austin Tate on Friday, 11 November 2011, 12:29 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:22 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 20 October 2011

Second Life - Holyrood Park Cloud Space - Discussion

Discussion on avatar identity and "personhood" using papers by Tom Boellstorff and James Paul Gee as a basis... in the Cloud Space discussion area over Holyrood Park in the Vue South region in Second Life.

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:23 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 16 November 2011

Are you on Another Planet?

I have been cooking up another project... the appeal of utopian "Other Worlds" and projecting identities into them (see Gee, 2003). The creative experience of imagineering such a world, making it plausible and "real", and inhabiting it in a social context is something I want to explore more.

http://atate.org/another-planet/

I have been initially building some images related to this on WallWisher and making some notes about a grammar of "connections", which I hope to partially explore in a Digital Cultures course assignment.

Gee, James Paul (2003) "Learning and Identity: what does it mean to be a half-elf?" from Gee, James Paul, What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy, pp 51-71, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:25 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 16 November 2011

Are You on Another Planet? - Well sort of... on a Moon Really

I have always been fascinated by fast cars, advanced planes and spacecraft and there is a thread running through my interests which I have been able to explore while creating my "Life Wall" - http://atate.org/ as part of the MSc in e-Learning Digital Cultures course - so this blog post fills in some background.

Fast Cars

Many members of my family have been involved in motorsport at a number of levels, and I got the bug early on. I had a scrambling motorbike that we used in fields adjacent to our house in Knottingley, West Yorkshire, and later developed a drag racing sprint bike that we raced at Ricall aerodrome on Drag Racing weekends with the North of Britain based British Quarter Mile Association (BQMA). I was already a rally car navigator for my older brotherSon local De Lacy Motor Club events before I could legally drive myself. I can read a map as if its a 3D model laid out before my eyes. We were taught to drive by my dad in our field and on local aerodromes, and I used my brother's (fast racing) go-kart a few times. Scary to be that close to the ground at nearly 100mph. I passed my driving test almost as soon as I was 17, joined the De Lacy Motor Club and competed in local rallies and driving test and motorcross, and I have a few trophies to show for the effort.

But my interest in fast cars and vehicles went beyond that. I loved the engineering cutaways shown in the "Eagle" comic each week, and I followed a number of UK and US Hot Rod and Drag Racing communities via magazines. I was lucky to be taken by my elder brother to see the first visit of the US Drag Racing Team to the UK, who brought over the dragsters then just touching 200mph from a standing start in a quarter mile sprint. Don Garlits, Don Prudehome, Tony Nancy and the other famous racers of the 1960s were all there when I saw a 200mph run at RAF Woodvale in Lancashire. I was an avid followers of the fascinating battle for the land speed record in the US between Art Arfons and Craig Breedlove as they went through 400mph, then 500mph and then 600mph in the space of a couple of years. My dad took us over to see Donald Campbell doing some of his trials runs on Coniston Water in the UK Lake District. I continue to follow the more recent land speed records attempts and have been a supporter of Richard Noble and Andy Green's supersonic record car in 1997 with my name being carried in certificates in the car as it did its runs at Black Rock Desert in Nevada. I now support the new Bloodhound SSC car being designed to do 1,000mph. My name will be on its tail.

Fast Planes

The early 1960s were a good time for those interested in fast planes and supersonic or hypersonic travel - with the X-15 rocket plane able to do hundreds of flights straight up into space and back on a ballistic trajectory. We are only just getting back to the time that will

be reasonably feasible again with Virgin Galactic's SpaceShip Two. Though it was not something that was known about to the general population in the 1960s, it later transpired that the SR-71 Blackbird was routinely flying at Mach 3 or more for many hours on high altitude spying and scientific missions since the 1950s. I still find the SR-71 the most beautiful aircraft and take every opportunity to visit one in the museums around the world as I travel. And I take one for a spin any time I can in Flight Simulators.

Far Space

So with these interests, its not surprising I was also interested in space. I was interested in space before sputnik flew, and already had (and still have) a well thumbed copy of Patrick Moore's "Boys Book of Space", with pencil drawings of the features of the moon in the back from my pre-teen years. I lived through the early Space Race years, and have my collectors cards that went from Sputnik up to visionary deep space probes and talk of a "Grand Tour" of the solar system which I loved the idea of. It would be some years before my AI planning software was used by NASA JPL as a basis for Steve Vere's Deviser planning system that would (after its launch) model the activity of the Voyager spacecraft which actually flew this Grand Tour mission, and continues to send tweets which I receive each day of its position far beyond the Solar System edge.

I have ready to use luggage labels (issued for promotional purposes) when I registered my interest in Thomas Cook flights to the Moon!

I am a Fellow of the British Interplanetary Society which is a fantastic way to stay in touch with space related activities as an amateur. But I have also worked professionally with the European Space Agency consulting on autonomous spacecraft, and worked on projects with them on planners for the ERS-1 spacecraft and a system for assembly. integration and test of Ariane launchers. Our work at AIAI has also fed into telecommand systems for EUMETSAT metrological spacecraft and for ground station planning for the UK Skynet observation spacecraft.

One thing we have found to be a great way to stay in touch with missions has been to place our name on lists carried on CDs, chips or plaques on board exploration spacecraft. We have had our names on the Opportunity and Spirit rovers now on Mars, and our name was carried on a chip on-board the return capsule on Stardust sample return mission to Comet Temple 1. The chip should be in the Smithsonian museum in future. Our names were also on the Deep Impact comet penetrator mission. Our names and photos (and those of my virtual world avatar after an invitation from a NASA Colab group I am part of in Second Life) have flown on each of the last flights of the Space Shuttle in the last 12 months. Unfortunately, we just missed seeing one launch while in Florida after a launch scrub, but did visit and see the penultimate Space Shuttle Discovery on its pad at Cape Canaveral. But in the past we have seen two shuttle launches. And we will shortly be off to Mars again on the new "Curiosity" Mars Exploration Lab.

Forever - To infinity and Beyond

But perhaps the one I find most interesting, is that our names and a poem I wrote were carried alongside other digital artifacts on board the European Space Agency's Huygens Titan lander taken by the Cassini spacecraft to Saturn. All contributors were provided with a copy of the whole set of artifacts by ESA when the content were completed before launch. We followed that whole mission. Huygens drifted down through methane clouds gently to land in soft terrain on the shores of a liquid methane lake overlooked by the rings of Saturn through a hazy sky.

Drift down through the clouds... We're with you.
Swing slowly on the parachutes aloft...

Our names now stand by that methane sea, at a point in the solar system beyond the distance where the Sun will eventually grow in its red giant stage and consume the Earth. To infinity... and beyond...

[Blog post originally on Digital Cultures on 8-Oct-2011. Reposted on Holyrood Park IDEL11 Blog for Presentation Purposes]

Keywords:

2 Comments (+/-)

1. In IDEL, we are exploring different digital environments as a basis for thinking about conceptual frameworks and pedagogical principles. These environments are generally already familiar to you and of course your work and interests take you so much further. It's been fascinating to see in this blog the digital spaces you have entered - and the real ones that you have entered digitally. I'm also enjoying reading the history; I've been a fan of John Naughton's *A Brief History of the Future* because of the way it captures the human aspects of the development of the internet, and your accounts have some some echoes of that.

   Christine Sinclair on Tuesday, 22 November 2011, 11:33 UTC

2. I agree the early history of the Internet has all sorts of interesting social aspects... and the timing was interesting in overlappping with a number of other developments - space exploration, more liberal attitudes, questioning of old authorities and elites, etc.

   This post by me on the Digital Cultures blog and especially the link may be of interest... scroll right to the bottom of that 1972 Rolling Stone magazine story for some fascinating stories...

   http://edc11.education.ed.ac.uk/austint/2011/11/09/spacewar-virtual-worlds-circa-1972/

   Austin Tate on Tuesday, 22 November 2011, 11:56 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:25 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 18 November 2011

Meta Body - Try an Out of Your Body Experience

A very beautifully designed Second Life region is worth exploring. I suggest you arrive in the Meta_Body area first. Use this teleport link:

- http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/Porto/132/109/703

Look at the (freely available) avatars to explore your identity and see which feel strange to you, and some which might appeal. There are a few male and more female avatars available to try. Select the strangest before you embark on a tour of the lovely areas which are on the land surface, on small islands, on sky islands, and underwater. Sit for a while on some of the areas. Click on things to see what they do.

Eventually find your way to a white ice themed area with a lady playing a white piano. Try touching the black "Omega Star Dream 5" sphere for an animated tour through some of the lower elements of the region. If you cannot find this use this SLurl to get there directly:

- http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/Porto/105/91/62

[Reposted from EDEDC Digital Cultures Blog]

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:57 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 24 November 2011

IDEL11 Second Life Voice Meeting on Presence

Also see

- http://atate.org/mscel/img/2011-11-24-IDEL11-SL-Voice-2.jpg
- http://atate.org/mscel/img/2011-11-24-IDEL11-SL-Voice-3.jpg

Space Navigator device I mentioned:

- http://www.3dconnexion.com/products/spacenavigator.html

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:26 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 24 November 2011

MSc in e-Learning Virtual Graduation 24-Nov-2011

All images for the MSc in e-Learning graduates, and some overview shots are at http://atate.org/mscel/virtual-grad/

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:27 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Explorations with VLEs and PLEs

Explorations with VLEs and PLEs

This section bring together postings relevant to exploring VLEs, PLEs and e-portfolio tools used in the University of Edinburgh and beyond.

In particular, there are a number of posting related to Moodle and the SLoodle module to allow its connection to Second Life or OpenSim. I was interesed in the open source Moodle VLE for both future University distance education support and to support the I-Room space for intelligent interaction research.

Top

Blog post: 15 September 2011

Moodle/SLoodle Experiments - Issue 1

A couple of years back we rigged up a Moodle VLE server (http://moodle.org) and set up some "courses" to support collaborative meetings especially to allow for file resource interchange and sharing, and for questionnaire's and feedback during meetings. We connected the web site to a meeting space in Second Life (http://secdondlife.com) using the Sloodle set (http://sloodle.org). The server still runs at http://openvce.net/moodle

I am interested again in Moodle 2 and recent work on a much richer in world linkup using the SLoodle kit which can now support rich shared media in Second Life, and important for the future, the open source OpenSimulator (http://opensimulator.org). We want to tie the questionnaire and shared resource handling more closely to intelligent systems for meeting room support - in our I-Room work (http://openvce.net/iroom).

I plan to use this blog to document progress, trials and tribulations as we go along in the hope others might find it useful.

The first thing was how messy all the information was on what the most recent versions of SLoodle were available and for which versions of Moodle. As a lot of people still use Moodle 1.9.x rather than the more recent Moodle 2.x. As usual a short e-mail to one of the core users in such a helpful community got me on the right path. But even then download links were stale, out of date copies had been archived and their link blogged rather than the original material, etc. So job number 1 was to start a web page with the up to date information as I found it... trying to show original URLs but also providing convenient URLs (in some cases to locally stored resources). That page is at http://openvce.net/sloodle and will evolve as things change or corrections are needed.

So to our main openvce.net web and database servers... the requirements for Moodle 2.1 means that a later version of PHP is needed than our computing support team are happy to have running due to security. This will be fixed, but not in an immediate time frame. So we use our usual backup experimental arrangement using one of the AIAI servers on which we have XAMPP to provide a convenient and simply managed Apache web server, MySQL database server, PHP and Perl scripting.

I am an optimist, so I unpack Moodle 2.x install it in the right place in the web server and just start the install script in a web browser. Ah well. Not so fast Austin. It complains the PHP version on XAMPP is JUST one sub release too old. Pity.

A close down of all services, an uninstall of the services, a reboot, a big safe backup of the web area, data base and some local files on the experimental machine, archive and an hour later I can try again. I put on the new version of XAMPP, reinstate the data base and web areas, put back the new Moodle area, etc. And kick it all back into life. A BIG PHP not running error in the browser stops me short. Half an hour of fiddling, no joy. Something in XAMPP upgrade has gone wrong.

Luckily I can roll back. ALWAYS CREATE A BACKUP BEFORE YOUR UPGRADE. Half an hour later and I am back to where I started with a slightly too old XAMPP and no Moodle 2.x. To be tried again another day. Watch for the next install meet.

Ah well, that's where the weekend went. I did still manage to see the Italian Grand Prix run at Monza on TV though, and was pleased Jenson Button came through to 2nd.

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:31 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 18 September 2011

Moodle/SLoodle Experiments - Issue 2

I attended a briefing about the new SLoodle 2 toolset on the EduNation III region of Second Life on Sunday 18-Sep-2011 by Paul Priebsch (avatar name: Fire Centaur). About 30 other educators were there.

The new toolset assumes a viewer that can support shared media a.k.a. media on a prim (MOAP). It currently runs in Second Life, and will soon be ported to OpenSim. It works with Moodle 1.9.x. In Moodle 2.x the quizzes may not yet function correctly, but most of the rest of the virtual world side set should. A feature of SLoodle 2 is the ability to set up "scenes" an rapidly rezz them in and around a classroom for a lesson, and then tidy them away so the ability can be re-used. The quiz chair can be set up to give rewards to students, or "penalise" them for failure... including dumping them in a shark filled pool with realistic screams!

As usual links and resources, and full size versions of these images of the demo meeting, are being gathered at http://openvce.net/sloodle

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:32 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 22 September 2011

Moodle/SLoodle Experiments - Issue 3

A way to display good quality text is important in the classrooms. Shared Media/Media-on-a-Prim (MOAP) allows a small number (say 4-6 simultaneously active) feeds from web pages, video, Flash, etc. to be visible on prim surfaces (like screens). This can include dynamic content from Moodle and other content management systems on the web. Note that many feeds from URLs can be set up... but only a few can show at once, the others simply turning off when not in view or when too many are in view.

But it is possible to show **much** more on screen when textures are rendered in world or images are uploaded and shown i world directly from the asset data base. This is is how most presentation screen have workled in Second Life and OpenSim until recently when Shared media/MOAP appeared. The trick is to use BOTH mechanism in a classroom - using uploaded images and displays where possible, but using the small number of MOAP feeds for dynamically delivered shared content.

But what if we could show dynamic text content as well using previously uploaded content via fonts in the asset data base, with display of characters from those fonts on prims set up as a display/blackboard.

Nexii Malthus in Second Life (previously an active member of the Second Life Teen Grid, and now on the main grid) has created a very nice text display using inworld font textures to do just this. Details at https://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/NexiiText2

Keywords:

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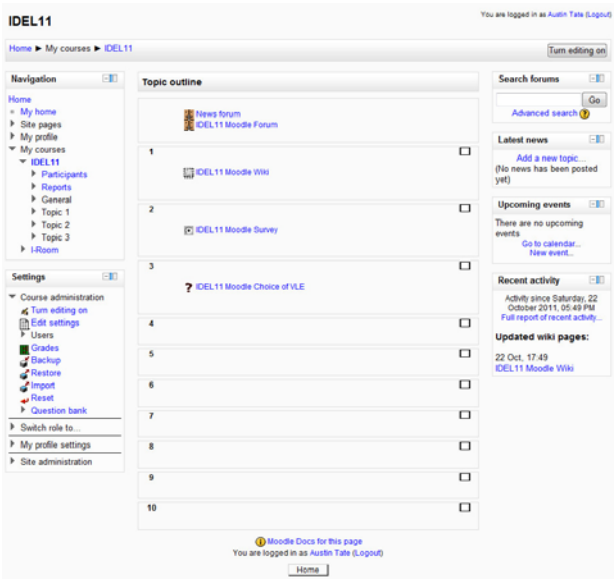
Blog post: 22 October 2011

Moodle/SLoodle Experiments - Issue 5

I have now used the admin account to set my self with a role of "course creator". Logging back on as myself I had the extra site administration menu to create a course. The setup was pretty easy and I set up a sample "IDEL11 Moodle" course... adding in a few initial "blocks" for a course collaborative Wiki (choosing simple visual NWiki editing style), a survey element, and a simple radio button style quiz showing everyone the answers to date before and after the vote.



The site uses the latest stable Moodle 2.1.1. It is not set up to scale or be properly managed so we will just add students manually for our testing. But after I get some of the basics I would be happy to let anyone on the IDEL11 course join a sample "IDEL11 Moodle" course as a student if they want to look round or have not used Moodle before.

When I have things working reasonably, I would be happy to manually add users accounts with role "Student" for other IDEL11 participants who wish to explore Moodle a little.

Keywords:

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Blog post: 10 October 2011

Moodle/SLoodle Experiments - Issue 4

We have been held up for a while in our experimentation with Moodle/SLoodle since the new versions (2.1.2 as at 10-Oct-2011) required a later version of PHP than our servers were set to. Apache/PHP changes are strictly controlled in the School of Informatics to address securuity issues, so its not something we can change quickly. Our main servers should be updated within the next month, but meantime, we updated a test server and now have a working Moodle 2.1.2 with a standing "course" for OpenVCE experimentation.

A new PhD student has started with our group, Punyanuch Borwarnginn from Thailand, having just completed the MSc in AI here. Her work will be in the area of Intelligent Learning Environments, and she will start with looking at aspects of Moodle, SLoodle and virtual worlds-based I-Room technology. Her blog on initial ideas is at: http://openvce.net/ile-proposal

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Keywords:

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Blog post: 23 October 2011

Moodle/SLoodle Experiments - Issue 6

I have been in contact with the SLoodle development and test community in the last few week, as they are preparing a release that can work with the latest Moodle 2.1+. The time now seems right to try the alpha code version they have prepared, and after a brief exchange this week updated to 2.0.10 alpha. This could be near to being set as the first Moodle 2.0+ and 2.1+ SLoodle release. Previous versions only worked with the older Moodle 1.9+ reelases.

I have also been in touch with the SLoodle web site folks to point make suggestions on improving the descriptions of how to obtain and build a SLoodle setup. These changes were made to http://sloodle.org on 23-Oct-2011.

I now have the 2.0.10 alpha Moodle modules zip distribution and in world SLoodle rezzer object from the "Fragile" systems dispenser in Second Life on the Chilbo region:

- http://download.socialminds.jp/sloodle/sloodle_v2.0.10-alpha.zip
- http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/Chilbo/181/19/93

So, these are ready to start testing a SLoodle classroom in Second Life with our Moodle 2.1.2 setup. I have made notes and given links to assist people intererested in Moodle and SLoodle at http://openvce.net/sloodle

Addendum: Cron job now set to run every 5 minutes to handle messaging and other matters. Set up as scheduled task on the server. See http://docs.moodle.org/20/en/Cron

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Keywords:

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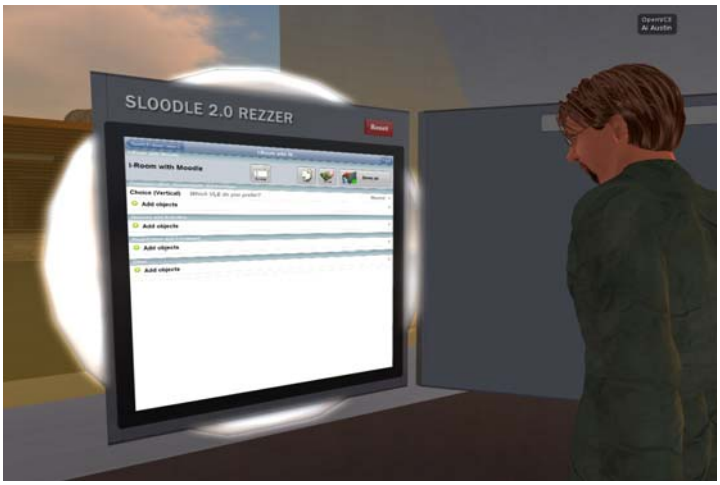
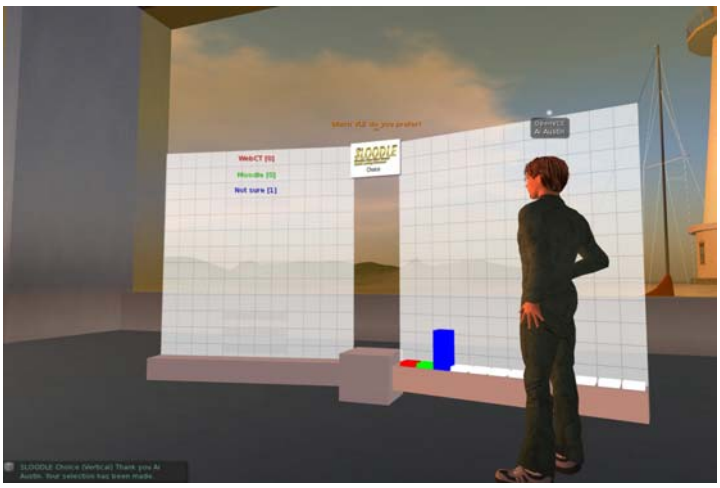
Blog post: 24 October 2011

Moodle/SLoodle Experiments - Issue 7

After a small change in a login method made by Edmund Edgar, one of the SLoodle developers, to one file at mod/set-1.0/shared_media/index.php the 2.0.10-alpha release of SLoodle works in the SLoodle classroom on the VCE region in Second Life connected to Moodle 2.1.2.

This change will be in the next build.The experimental classroom is at http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/VCE/223/226/23





Keywords:

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Blog post: 28 October 2011

Moodle/SLoodle Experiments - Issue 8

I have been testing elements of the SLoodle Second Life toolkit version 2.0.10 alpha alongside Moodle 2.1.2 and the SLoodle module 2.0.10 alpha with a few revisions being made by Edmund Elgar, a SLoodle developer and one of the owners of Avatar Classroom

(http://avatarclassroom.com). The testing is throwing up some minor issues and a couple of PHP scripts have been changed as a result. They will appear in the next alpha test build of SLoodle as the developers move towards the first beta version suitable for Moodle 2.

To date the tests have included:

1. chat link up between a Second Life classroom and the Moodle chat tool, and logging of authorised by individual avatars in world
2. in-world assessment delivery drop box
3. presentation screen using shared media web based image, video and web page URL assets
4. multiple choice voting and presentation display

Keywords:

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Blog post: 28 October 2011

Moodle/SLoodle Experiments - Issue 9 - Mobile Apps

There is an iPhone/iPod/iPad app called "My Moodle" which provides mobile device access to Moodle 2.1+. See http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/my-moodle/id461289000

The experimental Moodle 2.1.2 site at AIAI now has mobile web services enabled as required to support this app - they are off by default. See http://docs.moodle.org/20/en/Enable_mobile_web_services

My initial attempts to snap a screen shot image with an iPod and upload it via the My Moodle app indicated the file exceeded the maximum upload file size, yet the PNG file involved was only 44KB... and our site is set for upload file limits of 8MB to 128MB depending on what layer is filtering.

A future road map for development of the My Mobile app is available. See http://docs.moodle.org/dev/Mobile_app

Keywords:

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The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 30 October 2011

Moodle/SLoodle Experiments Issue 10 - Cron and the Zombies

Its Halloween, and the Zombies have attacked!

There has been a bit of a struggle to get the "cron" job running on the Moodle setup. cron.php is an admin routine that is run every few minutes to do a number of maintenance things, like pulling in information feeds, external blogs, clearing away pending messages, etc. It need a bit of setting up and a couple of different mechanisms using the Windows Task Manager had not been working correctly.

I had settled on a way to initiate the cron.php script by calling it from a job every few minutes which launched the Firefox/Mozilla browser run the job, and then should have terminated. I got that suggestion off blog postings by others who has similar problems getting cron to run. It seemed to work after I set it up on testing, so I left it for a day or so... But when I came back... spookily... there were many "Zombie" processes running. My colleague experienced in these matters tells me that happens when you launch a browser to run a script in a web page and he had seen this issue before.

We are also still working to get the outward bound e-mail going on our Moodle 2.1.2 setup on Windows. This is way more complicated than it should be with many layers involved. Settings are all over the place in Apache, PHP, Moodle and beyond your machine in the SMTP server you use, as well as perhaps in multiple firewalls and out bound messaging spam filters on the way. We have been gradually picking our way through these layers. Our University will not allow e-mail out with a "from" address that is not validated as a legitimate University address - sensibly. So we are having to use a "Moodle Admin" address personally tied to a staff member at the moment, which is not ideal. We have established a "noreply" address that will validate now too. More layers to work out before its working properly I am afraid.

In general, I also am finding a lot of Moodle settings are hidden away a bit or are in several places or in multiple layers whic all need to coordinate. Things like e-mail setup is under Site Administration -> Plugins -> Message Outputs -> E-mail. The site admin/support e-mail addresses also appear there and in Site Administration -> Server -> Site Contact. Rooting round to change the roles an individual is assigned is also convoluted, rather than just a set of check boxes off the user page you have to edit roles... and not via the edit button but by knowing to click on the role title hyperlink. And some roles are considered "System Roles" which are changed on a different web page.

Keywords:

1 Comments (+/-)

1. I wonder if one day we'll look back at all these layers and think how difficult we made things for ourselves! But there is always a great deal of complexity going on even when what is on top is intuitive and straightforward. I've also been exasperated by layers and settings for both WebCT and Moodle and that's without very high level access privileges. For end users – whether teachers or students - there's a danger that by the time they've worked out where to put things, they've forgotten why they wanted to!

   On the other hand, I like the fact that this kind of work behind the scenes forces engagement with logic – and recognising that different people will employ different kinds of reasoning for how the layers should work.

   Love the Zombie!

   Christine Sinclair on Tuesday, 01 November 2011, 15:28 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:38 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 10 November 2011

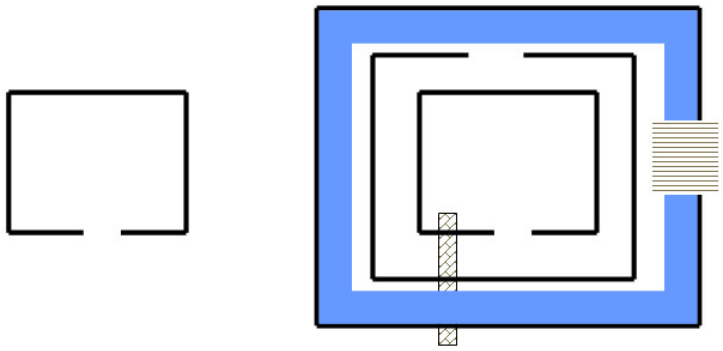
Moodle/SLoodle Experiments Issue 11 - Walled Garden or Castle Battlements and Labyrinths

Our experience of setting up Moodle as an administrator, for a couple of sample courses of different kinds (weekly, topic based and social format) and by adding in the SLoodle module both in the web end of Moodle and in Second Life classroom has been a frustrating

experience. This is a mostly due to the very many layers of user permissions, user roles, different styles of setup, confusion over what happens at site, user and course levels, and interactions between these, and so on. We still cannot work out why some users can see their SLoodle profiles and others cannot even with all permissions ticked on (more than should be needed).

This makes me think of the "Walled Garden" idea which is how I see VLEs like Blackboard's WebCT. The wall is there for a number of reasons:

- To protect those inside;
- To protect and control access to the assets inside;
- To keep out undesirables;
- To provide a clear gateway where people can enter, or request entry.



Walled Garden with Gate

Castle Defences with Moats, Drawbridges & Secret Tunnels

But my mental picture of Moodle is more like a complex arrangement of "Castle Defences" with multiple battlements, with entry points offset from one another and the direction to turn not obvious at every level. There are moats and some bridges across. But you are not sure where they all are. There may even be secret tunnels you don't know about and that others may be able to use, and you suspect there are as its all so labyrinthine.

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:39 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 25 November 2011

Moodle/SLoodle Experiments Issue 12 - Customised Inworld Object

With kind support from Edmund Edgar I have been experimenting with the "Demo Object" in SLoodle, which is a stub or template for developing customised objects in Second Life or OpenSim which can connect with a corresponding module in the Moodle VLE.

Moodle Module Setup

The Moodle "demo-1.0" module is in the standard SLoodle distribution - I am using version 2.0.10 alpha. And can be found in mod/sloodle/mod/demo-1.0. The object_definitions/default.php script should be altered to "show" the object in the inworld Rezzer.

Edmund Edgar points out:

Note that if you have syntax errors in an object definition file or extra whitespace outside the PHP brackets, lots of things will break.

The in-world object will need an extra script:
.../mod/sloodle/mod/set-1.0/sloodle_rezzer_object.lsl
which deals with setting up communication with the server, and sends linked messages to any other scripts in it with information about the Moodle server it needs to connect to, and any other configuration parameters it might have.

Inworld Object Setup

1. An object should be created in world with default name "SLOODLE Demo Object" or an alias "SLOODLE 1.1 Demo Object" both of which are permitted by settings which act as exemplars in object_definitions/default.php
2. Into this object, two scripts should be placed. One is obtained from .../mod/sloodle/mod/demo-1.0/sloodle_mod_demo-1.0.lsl The other is a generic script and can be obtained from .../mod/sloodle/mod/set-1.0/sloodle_rezzer_object.lsl. These are the base that can be used to create a custom module.
3. Set the permissions of the in world object and its scripts as appropriate and then take a copy into inventory.
4. Drop that object into the contents of the inworld SLOODLE Rezzer.

You should now be able to use the Rezzer as normal to select an appropriate SLOODLE controller and scene, and then under "Other" objects you will find the "Demo Object" which you can add to the scene. After it rezzes in a default position close by the Rezzer, reposition it where you want, and then hit the "Freeze" button on the Rezzer screen to sync the current position of the scene objects.

Other Templates

There are some other objects in the SLoodle kit which can also act as guides, such as the "SLOODLE Tracker Button" which when clicked in world communicates with a Moodle module and gives a message back.

Current Status

At the time of writing I have the SLOODLE Demo Objects rezzing from the SLOODLE Rezzer, but don't yet have Moodle responding through it. Testing continues.

Keywords:

1 Comments (+/-)

1. At 14:25 10/12/2011, Edmund Edgar wrote:

> XML-RPC is used by the distributor tool to allow you to choose an object in Moodle and get it sent to an avatar in-world. IIRC it isn't used anywhere else. We plan to rewrite that to use HTTP-in instead, but we haven't got around to it yet, as we've found XML-RPC unreliable in the past.
>
> It wouldn't surprise me if a grid that doesn't allow incoming XML-RPC doesn't allow incoming HTTP-in either. That would break Sloodle 2 rezzer, and also the mechanism that we use for updating the new scoreboard when scores change. We'll be using HTTP-in more in future, so it will break more tools going forward.
>
> We do have a plan to add a method to fall back on HTTP polling for situations where HTTP-in won't work (either because the Moodle won't let traffic out or because the grid won't let it in), but it'll probably be a while until we do it.

Austin Tate on Saturday, 10 December 2011, 16:39 UTC

Imported at: 10/12/2011 16:39 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 06 December 2011

Moodle/SLoodle Experiments Issue 13 - External Tools as Course Activities

Moodle 2.2 released today (6-Dec-2011) includes a facility which allows for the embedding of tools that are provided externally as activities on courses. Close integration is possible using the IMS Global Learning Tool Interoperability (IMS LTI) standard. See http://www.somerandomthoughts.com/blog/2011/11/28/moodle-2-supports-connecting-to-ims-lti-tools/

But the same mechanism allows for effectively any external tool to be easily embedded (above showing the Edinburgh MSc in e-Learning IDEL11 Course Holyrood Park ELGG Blog). The simple mechanism just means you input the URL from which the tool or contents are served. More advanced facilities allow for proper IMS LTI integration. See the image of the advanced version of the tool options.

Keywords:

Imported at: 06/12/2011 15:43 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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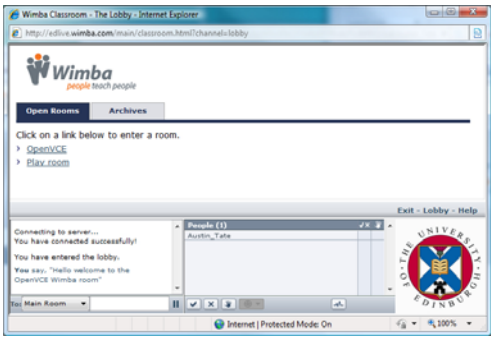
Blog post: 19 September 2011

Wimba Classroom Tests

On the suggestion of Fiona Littleton of Information Services, and a tutor on the MSc in e-Learning, I have had a Wimba Classroom set up for test related to the Open Virtual Collaboration Environment in OpenVCE.net



Keywords:

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The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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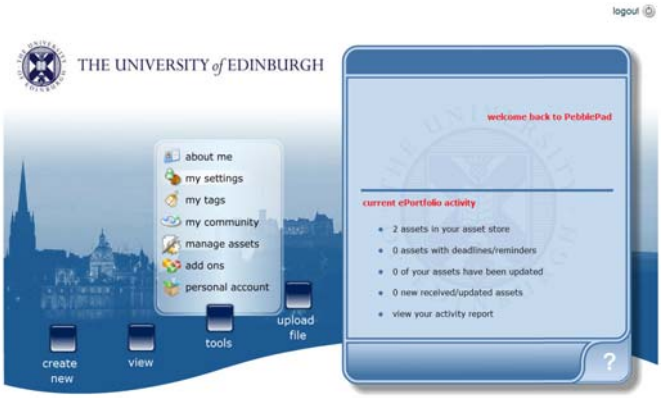
Blog post: 21 October 2011

Exploring the PebblePad ePortfolio



The PebblePad ePortfolio system is used to support personal learning spaces in the University of Edinburgh

- http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/information-services/services/learning-technology/e-portfolios
- http://www.jisc.ac.uk/eportfolio

If on EASE, you can log in via http://www.pebblepad.co.uk/edinburgh/pebblepad.aspx or launch from a button on MyEd with EASE login as student (MyEd - under Studies tab) or staff (MyEd - under Teaching tab).

My first experience indicated that creation of a trivial note with a few pasted web links was a very time consuming process, far beyond its value... and the resulting links note was poorly accessible with many steps to retrieve it or edit it. The system seems designed for a very small number of assets rather than many tyhousands of assets in complex structures that would be needed in a serious personal learning environment for the future.

Keywords:

1 Comments (+/-)

1. Interesting. Some links for convenience:
    - http://www.leapspecs.org/2A/ - move work between e-Portfolio systems
    - http://mahara.org/ - open source e-Portfolio

Austin Tate on Wednesday, 16 November 2011, 17:35 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:42 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 21 October 2011

Personal Learning Environments and Mashup Spaces

I like to create a web page when I start a new project... to add in the useful web links, pointers to information, notes, etc. Then I gradually structure that as more content is created. Most recently I have been doing that in the Drupal content management system

on http://openvce.net which provides convenient additional facilities such as column layout, blocks in to which content can be placed, mash-up capabilities right down to adding custom HTML and PHP code, and ancillary blogging, image handling, etc.

But for the MSc activities I chose to do some of this in my own web area at http://atate.org which initially just had my work on the "bat Life Wall" and where I wanted to collect together assets that would be long lived. I have more recently added extra areas there for my course blogs and Lifestream, my Junior Hairdressing experience for the ULOE11 module, and the virtual ethnography study for the Digital Cultures EDEDC11 module. There is also a password protected personal work area.

For work in week 6 of the IDEL11 course we will be exploring personal learning spaces and mash-ups, and so I have tried to look to do something new... something I have been meaning to explore for a while. I wanted to use a much more flexible layout that is cleaner, and adapts to the width of anyone's viewer. And into which I can drop elements without causing problems of rendering in the wide range of browsers.

I am experimenting at http://atate.org/space/ which such a personal working space. It is based on a freely available and nice simple CSS style sheet from http://matthewjamestaylor.com/. I have customised it somewhat for my sans serif font preference and colour choices. I added initial content that I had been collecting at http://openvce,.net./mscel and put in quick access tabs for my current MSc work and blogs.

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:42 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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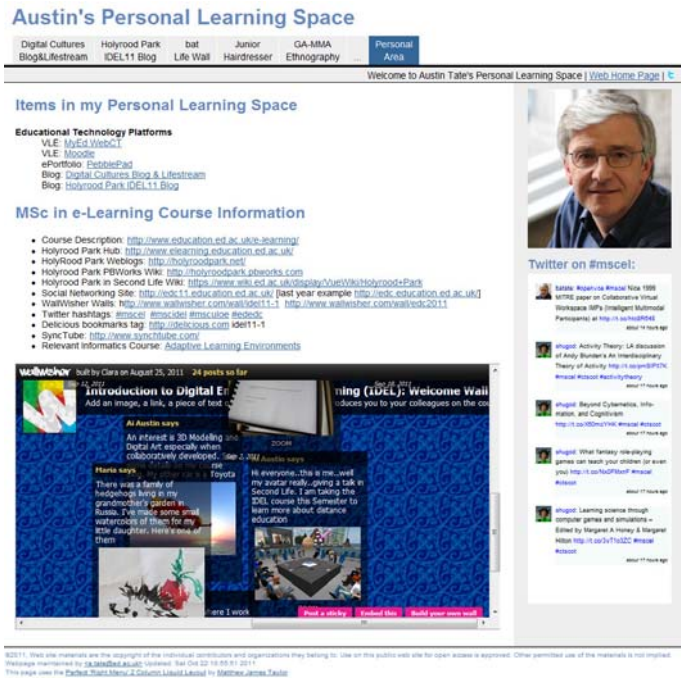
Blog post: 22 October 2011

Austin's Personal Learning Space

I have begun to create my Personal Learning Space... for which I prefer a flexible web site in an area that can outlive specific technologies and institutional changes. If I invest time in creating things like this I want to feel they can be preserved for use in future. Using proprietary products frustrates me as I know they will be lost or become unavailable sooner rather than later usually. The space uses a new (to me) flexible width flowing layout in CSS that should be useful in future projects. I have been meaning to try such a layout for a while, and this was the perfect excuse. It should work on most browsers and mobile platforms. Tests to date are positive in that respect. The site uses my usually folder structure to keep things neat, with all style elements in one directory (inc), images in another (img), further resources (res), and a password protected area for items that cannot be made public, but which I want to gather into the space for convenience. The site also uses, as is normal for my projects, relative URLs throughout so it can be rehosted easily, parts reused in other projects, or the whole site cut to a DVD/CD for archive.



For now the Personal Learning Space just gives quick access tabs to work already done on the MSc in e-Learning, a few blocks of embedded Twitter and the WallWisher for the IDEL11 course, and some useful links for the courses I am on which I previously had scattered across http://openvce.net/mscel and in desktop shortcuts across a number of desktops, a laptop and several mobile devices. The initial space is at http://atate.org/space/.

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:42 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 22 October 2011

Proprietary or Open Products for Personal Learning Spaces?

I believe that in future students when they first join a good educational institution should be given access to an e-mail address or equivalent, individual blog and a resources space which they can use for life. It will support them while a student, and later in their professional lives and into retirement. It will allow for alumni and continuing educational engagement. But it will be primarily centred on being a service and benefit to the individual, not as a marketing mechanism for the hosting institution. It must be secure and not allowed to be sold to some external hosting company for data mining. It must use open standards and allow for ease of movement across to a new institution in whole or in part. It should allow the user to create and store assets they can use via a single stable URL or URI for life... images, documents, assignments, artifacts or various kinds. And reliably embed them in

The current mode of using proprietary products that lack standards, and are poor at import and export, militates against this.

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:43 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 04 November 2011

Personal Profiles

My interest in personal portable information stores and information predates my use of the approach as a PLE.

I am interested in a computer-based personal assistant and ways in which that could build information to help you throughout your life. Issues of privacy and ownership and location of that information immediately are an issue when that is contemplated. Its clear to me that this means the data must be owned, hosted and controlled by an individual in some way, and ANY access to it approved and logged at the user ownership end. This is WAY WAY different to its being hosted and accesible to Facebook and Google+ (or an Institution like a government, insurance company or teaching organisation).

I liked recently a pointer from Daniel Griffin on the MSc Digital Cultures course on the Diaspora Freedom in Software community (http://diasporafoundation.org/ and https://joindiaspora.com/) and specifically to Eben Moglen's "Freedom in The Cloud" presentation at NYU Feb 5 2010. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QOEMv0S8AcA

I was reminded of some discussions I had 20 years ago with telecoms providers about a user centric architecture for use of personal profile information from a computer-based personal assistant. the personal information was served on each request from the user end and with access to information and resources controlled by the user... WAY WAY different o how we have come to use Facebook and Google+ where our data is in their servers and used when they want for their benefit.

Section 3 - The Personal Profile - From http://www.aiai.ed.ac.uk/~bat/tania.pdf

One important feature of the approach to be taken is that the concept of a long lived Personal Profile for communications and information use will be established. It will be a guarantee of the approach that the information that an individual builds in their co-worker personal profile will be able to stand alone and be meaningful outside of its specific use in this particular generation of information agent. We will establish the concept of a separate transportable personal profile that can accompany the user for the rest of his or her life and can grow with him or her.

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:44 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 07 November 2011

PLEs and the Technicalities

My earlier blog postings have described my own preferred approach to the creation of a PLE which at its outer level is simply an easily customised web page. I chose a freely available well constructed CSS1 stylesheet that maximised the viewable area of the central content when viewed on a wide range fo devices and browsers, using a layout that allows for flexible width. Below this top levele entry web page a number of directories hold the locally stored content, for my own images, screenshots, and resources that it is suitable to provide locally (i.e. have no copyright issues) and these can be pulled into the web page via relative URLs to allow for the whole PLE to be easily shifted to a new hosting environment, used locally off a memory stick, or cut to CD. The resources and images can also be used in other blogging and course discussion forums via URL reference where appropriate.

This approach works fine for me, as I am comfortable with using a simple text editor to edit HTML directly, and have a simplistic but working understanding of the CSS style sheet approach. I also can access an area where I can store and serve the files easily. But this custom approach is not suitable for all. Technically a way to create such a custom web area and make changing its content and layout easier would be preferable for some. There are many drag and drop frameworks for dropping in content in "frames" and an emerging set of "widgets" that can be dropped into "containers" in such self hosted web sites using a number of script libraries. Again, this can be quite technical to initially set up, but easy to use thereafter. I do worry about the long term stability of some of these mechanisms though, and they do mean that the contents have to be served using a web server, rather than it being possible to simply copy and use the files on a memory stick or off a CD locally on a single computer off-line Some blogging frameworks like WordPress, richer content management systems like Drupal and Joomla, and commercial platforms like iGoogle provide simple approaches for columns of content with inclusion of "blocks" made up of various types of content, widgets and frames.

The issue of security and legality must also be taken into account. there can be legal constraints on the monitoring which an institution is obliged to perform on its own staff communications, and in some cases on the official communications of its students. Issues of copyright infringement may also need to be investigated. These legal requirements can be made more difficult in highly decentralised and personalised environments.

A study of the use of personal web sites as the basis for PLEs at Graz University of Technology (UT Graz) in Austria (Taraghi et al., 2010) described a set of issues to be considered before going on to describe their own framework and approach. They base their approach on work by Schaffert & Hilzensauer who describe seven crucial aspects to consider in the adoption of PLEs:

- The role of the learner
- Personalisation
- Content
- Social involvement
- Educational & organisational

So, it is important to look at ways in which the basic approach of using a personalised web page and web area as the basis for a PLE might be made more widely accessible and accesptable within the constraints of an educational institution's role and requirements. An educational establishment can encourage the use of PLEs alongside their institutional learning support systems. It could seek to provide a framework or "template" approach which all students can adopt and adapt a framework or arrangement that suits them, and that they feel comfortable supports them and the degree of autonomy they seek.

Reference

Schaffert, S. and Hilzensauer, W (2008) "On the way towards Personal Learning Environments: Seven crucial aspects," in eLearning Papers, no. 9, July, 2008.

Taraghi, B., Ebner, M., Till, G. and Muhlburger, H. (2010) "Personal Learning Environment - A Conceptual Study", iJET - Volume 5, Special Issue 1: "ICL2009 - MashUps for Learning", January 2010.

Keywords:

1 Comments (+/-)

1. Thanks for making this entry public, Austin - I think there are some valuable insights here for us all about the tensions between personal and institutional requirements of PLEs and some useful references for anyone interested in pursuing this further (I'm assuming they are useful – I'm just about to go and look for them myself!) Some of the communications in the discussion boards and the blogs suggest this as an important topic for debate.

Christine Sinclair on Wednesday, 09 November 2011, 10:15 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:44 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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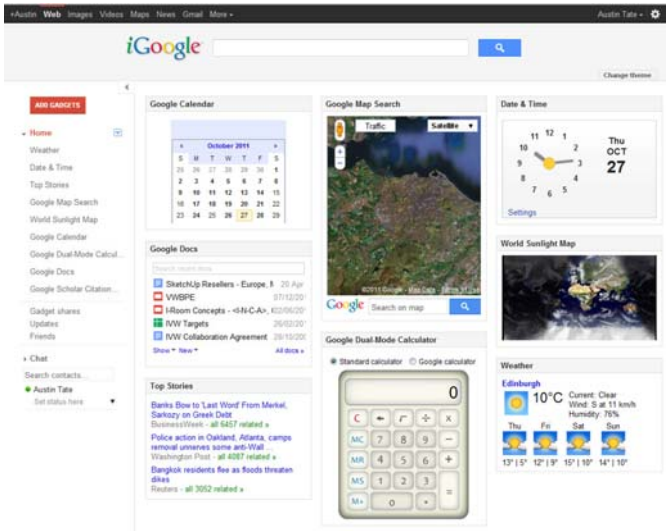
Blog post: 16 November 2011

PLE Examples - iGoogle

iGoogle is sometimes used as a framework for an individual's PLE, since it provides a convenient and readily accessible "container" for a range of widgets and content items which can easily be added and removed. It is also relatively open in the types of widget and content that can be embedded.



My iGoogle page is here... I occasionally have it up on a secondary computer as its convenient to have the calculator, search functions and quick links to my Google calendar, contacts, e-mail etc. I also like the world map with sun shadow widget which can be made full screen on the secondary computer screen which is a nice. Better than buying the $3,000 executive version :-)

Keywords:

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The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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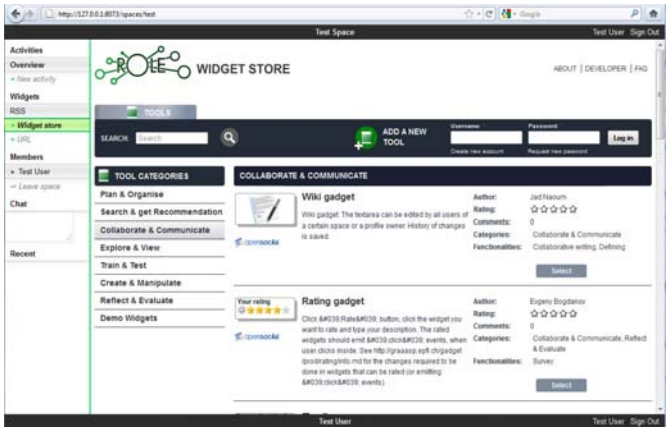
Blog post: 15 November 2011

ROLE Model - Responsive Open Learning Environments

Responsive Open Learning Environments (ROLE - http://www.role-project.eu/) is an EU project which provides an interesting example of a learning environment being created with an open widget based approach which might allow for a personal learning environment to be created by an individual within the context of a managed learning environment for a course.



It makes use of the OpenSocial (http://opensocial.org) API for widgets to allow for a range of community contributed widgets to be used.

There is an Open University provided introductory course on ROLE and information on incorporating ROLE elements into a Personal Learning Environment accessible at http://labspace.open.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=7433

Keywords:

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The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Engagement with Other Distance Education Courses at Edinburgh and Beyond

Engagement with Other Distance Education Courses at Edinburgh and Beyond

This section bring together a few choice posts on some elements of work on other MSC in e-Learning courses I wanted to share with fellow course participants. In particular my ULOE11 "Learning Challenge" which was to be trained in blow-drying technique.

It also shows a post related to a distance education delivered AI course I took part in at Stanford University with 150,000 registered participants. It was interesting to see how the assessment and class interactions were managed.

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Blog post: 17 October 2011

Distance Education Stanford AI Class Underway

I am sitting in on the distance learning MSc Introduction to AI Class at Stanford - http://www.ai-class.com/ - to observe the way they use technolgy for distance education. They seem to make very good use of short multiple choice answers and "click over the options" type quizzes after each brief video segment to make sure people are understanding. I also see they will be using "badges" to show progress in the class and its assignments.

For those of you that have not heard of this... its believed to be the largest distance learning class ever - with 150,000 registered students.

Keywords:

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The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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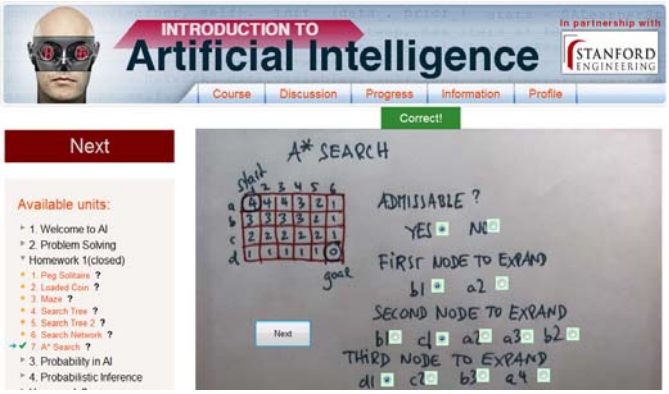
Blog post: 22 October 2011

Stanford AI Class - Largest Ever Distance Education Course

I am enrolled on the on-line Stanford AI Class... http://ai-class.com - along with 150,000 others - to watch how they present and deliver the "Introduction to AI" course, to see how the on-line assessment and quizzes work, and to see how student interaction with tutors and each other is arranged. Its been an interesting experience so far. Everyone seems to be enjoying the course and the community. The short video segments for each lecture are broken up with quizzes to check understanding as you go along. Often with check boxes and type in areas overlaid with the video material itself.



Keywords:

2 Comments (+/-)

1. Hi Austin. I'm enrolled in the AI class too, although I've switched to a basic enrollment so I don't have to keep up with the homework. I'm finding it hard to find enough hours in the week on top of work and IDEL. In fact I'm a bit behind I think, having only done the first two units, but so far I'm fiding the experience worthwhile. The videos are really clearly presented and the way the course id designed to take you through the material step by step works well with this kind of subjetc matter. I think this brings out that padagogy has to be suited to the area of study. IDEL is very discursive and the sorts of tasks and resources we have reflect that.

   With the AI class, contrastingly, I appreciate the more linear progression as the material in each lesson often builds directly on previous videos. What do you think?

   s9347311 on Sunday, 23 October 2011, 22:07 UTC

2. I was realistic and registered for Basic Mode access from the start I wanted to see how the courses were structured and delivered... and how the quizzes, online assessment and class contacts worked for such a large class.

   I agree... for this course there is a lot of material and there are well established text books and flows to get people through it. I like the frequent short quizzes to check understanding. I found I had a lot of out by one counting errors on paths through search trees... as I was probably not paying sufficient attention to the question... so I left out start nodes in the count and so on. But it made you think.

   This goes beyond distance education. I think quizzes like this could work in on-campus lessons as well... everyone will have some sort of mobile device (or could be lent one for the session) that could link the to a class wide quiz and feedback session.. much like clickers are used in some lectures today.

   Austin Tate on Monday, 24 October 2011, 09:22 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:50 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 19 October 2011

Junior Hairdresser - Lesson 1

As part of my "Learning Challenge" for the Understanding Learning in the On-line Environment module, I have now had my first lesson... it was exciting going to class again and in a totally different environment. Reminds of the the great buzz I always sense at the start of each new academic year amongst students and staff!

There was a LOT to take in.. but Karen Temple who is training me took things step by step. She was keen not to over do the theory and looking at books, so I got introduced right away to my "model" for the day... a disembodied head on a tripod.. but with a lovely head of hair on her to work on. It was washed and left tousled to let me learn on it.

But first we went through the various brush types... and parts of the comb. See http://atate.org/mscel/hair/. Then onto how the hair is "sectioned" to allow it to be worked on in parts and layers. It was very tricky to know where to place your hands and fingers to get best grip on the hair... and I was not separating the parts very well. I realised I was thinking about it a bit too much and when I did it a bit sloppier (at first) I got the rhythm more I think.

It took some two hours to fix my model's hair this first time. That would be a LONG appointment. Anyway she has come home with me now for homework. So I am asked to go in next week and show Karen how I can do the whole job. And the plan is that I will then be let loose on a live model. Now that will be a thrilling experience for me... and I bet for her - hopefully not in the horror film sense!

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:53 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 20 October 2011

Junior Hairdresser - Homework 1

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:55 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 25 October 2011

Junior Hairdresser - Passing on the Skill

For a full photo diary and report on my ULOE11 Learning Challenge see http://atate.org/mscel/hair/

Keywords:

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The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 26 October 2011

Junior Hairdresser - Live Model

Emma very patiently let me do her hair today during my training session:

I now have access to the Hairdressing Foundations e-Teaching course at http://eteachhairdressing.co.uk along with some exercises to complete there. I have also been given Hairdressing Trainee Model Sheets showing my experience and an assessment of my progress. They will appear in my Hairdresser Training Photo Log at http://atate.org/mscel/hair/ and are available via a link on my new Personal Learning Space at http://atate.org/space/

Keywords:

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The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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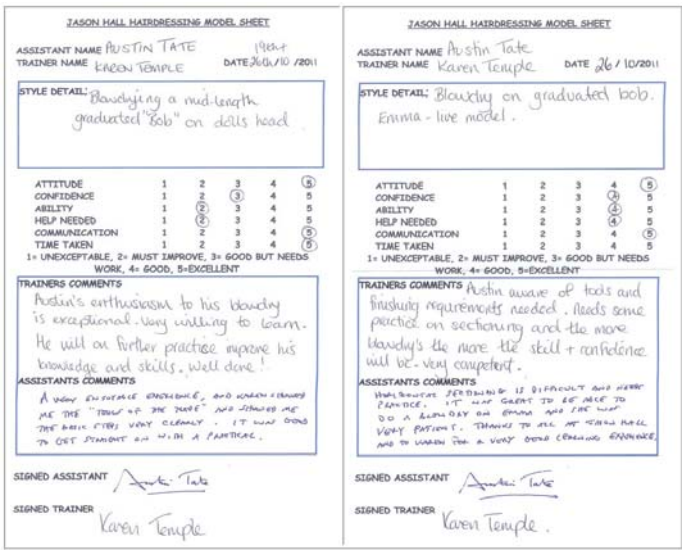
Blog post: 26 October 2011

Junior Hairdresser - Final Assessment

Here is my assessment as a trainee hairdresser on blow drying... from the first go to my final attempt on a live model today.



JASON HALL HAIRDRESSING MODEL SHEET

ASSISTANT NAME AUSTIN TATE
TRAINER NAME KAREN TEMPLE
DATE 26th/10/2011

STYLE DETAIL: Blowdrying a mid-length graduated "Bob" on dolls head

ATTITUDE	1	2	3	4	5
CONFIDENCE	1	2	3	4	5
ABILITY	1	2	3	4	5
HELP NEEDED	1	2	3	4	5
COMMUNICATION	1	2	3	4	5
TIME TAKEN	1	2	3	4	5

1= UNEXCEPTABLE, 2= MUST IMPROVE, 3= GOOD BUT NEEDS WORK, 4= GOOD, 5=EXCELLENT

TRAINERS COMMENTS
Austin's enthusiasm to his blowdry is exceptional. Very willing to learn. He will on further practice improve his knowledge and skills. Well done!

ASSISTANTS COMMENTS
A very enjoyable experience, and Karen showed me the "tools of the trade" and showed me the basic steps very clearly. It was good to get straight on with a practical.

SIGNED ASSISTANT Austin Tate
SIGNED TRAINER Karen Temple

JASON HALL HAIRDRESSING MODEL SHEET

ASSISTANT NAME Austin Tate
TRAINER NAME Karen Temple
DATE 26/10/2011

STYLE DETAIL: Blowdry on graduated bob. Emma - live model.

ATTITUDE	1	2	3	4	5
CONFIDENCE	1	2	3	4	5
ABILITY	1	2	3	4	5
HELP NEEDED	1	2	3	4	5
COMMUNICATION	1	2	3	4	5
TIME TAKEN	1	2	3	4	5

1= UNEXCEPTABLE, 2= MUST IMPROVE, 3= GOOD BUT NEEDS WORK, 4= GOOD, 5=EXCELLENT

TRAINERS COMMENTS Austin aware of tools and finishing requirements needed. Needs some practice on sectioning and the more blowdry's the more the skill + confidence will be - very competent.

ASSISTANTS COMMENTS
Horizontal sectioning is difficult and needs practice. It was great to be able to do a blowdry on Emma and she was very patient. Thanks to all at Jason Hall and to Karen for a very good learning experience.

SIGNED ASSISTANT Austin Tate
SIGNED TRAINER Karen Temple.

Keywords:

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Engagement Beyond

Engagement Beyond

I collect together in this section a number of postings related to my engagement with other communities beyond the distance education work.

This includes my engagement with the OpenSimulator community, for which I am on the development team as a testing member. We run a 4 host OpenSim grid called "Openvue" which is kept at the very latest versions for test purposes, and is set up to allow cross-grid transport via the "HyperGrid".

We also have regions on OSGrid (which has 70,000 users), New World Grid (in France) and the US Army's non-classified MOSES grid. I am a member of the Steering Board for MOSES.

Some recent work has also involved experimentation with Unity3D as an alternative 3D virtual world platform.

A couple of the postings related to the death in October 2011 of Prof. John McCarthy, pioneer of AI and someone I knew personally. The short piece on the "Robot and the Baby" was originally written at the request of an editor at the New York Times for a potential round up of famous people who had died in 2011, but was not selected to go into the final cut.

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Blog post: 21 October 2011

MOSES Office Hours

MOSES: Military Open Simulator Enterprise Strategy (http://openvce.net/moses) - is an OpenSim grid used for research purposes by educators and a range of organisation exploring simulation technology for training. I am owner of a region on the grid for Open Virtual Collaboration Environment work with the US Army, and am a member of the Board of Directors who guide the development of MOSES.

The image is of one of the Office Hours meetings between estate owners...

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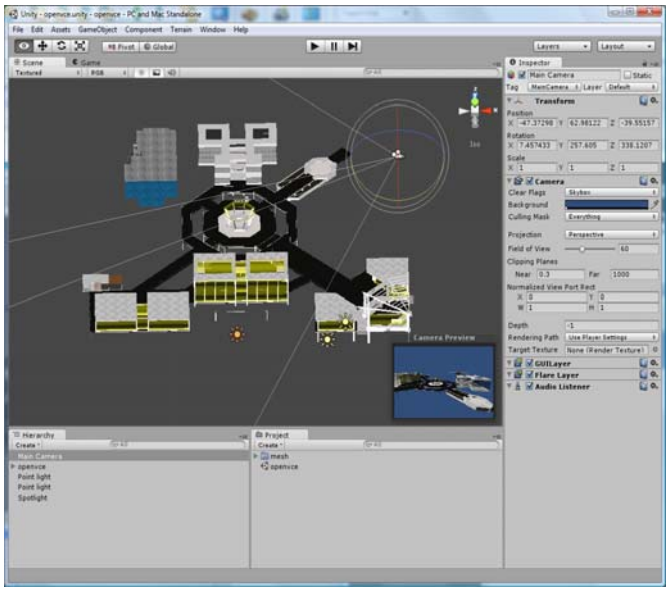
Blog post: 30 November 2011

OpenVCE Virtual Worlds Assets moved from OpenSim to Unity3D via Tipodean Collada Converter

On my research project related to supporting the OpenVCE communities at http://openvce.net/ I was engaged in setting up a new group portal on the APAN (All Partners Access Network) hosted by the US Government for non-classified work between government agencies, NGOs, organisation and individuals across the world. This replaces the previous HarmonieWeb portal. the APAN network uses the Telligent Collaboration framework to provide the usual blogs, discussion forums, wikis, group chat, etc. And then provides an Adobe Connect service attached to that for the supported communities. We provide "web observer" meeting access to virtual words meeting spaces via Adobe Connect services through these portals. I was involved in a number of training programmes and setup exercises as I took on the group owner role on APAN.

I did some further experimentation with the Unity3D platform, and used a Collada mesh translation of the OpenVCE OpenSim region buildings created via a converter service from Tipodean technologies in the USA. We are further experimenting also with the OpenSim-based MOSES grid hosted by the US Government also for work with non-government agencies internationally.



We believe that a combination of the APAN OpenVCE Group for a community web portal and a simplified meeting space in either the OpenSim-based MOSES grid or on a Unity3D setup might offer a long term stable basis for continuing work in the OpenVCE.net community. Currently a Drupal server at Edinburgh is used for the community web portal, and the virtual words service is hosted on the VCE region in Second Life.

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The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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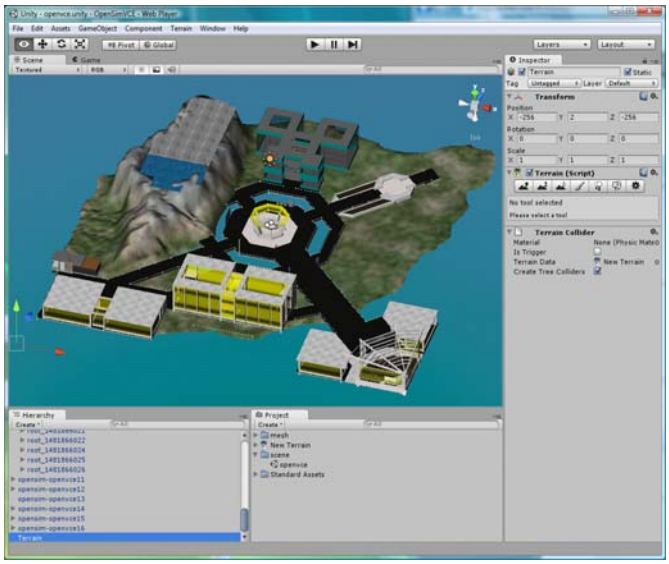
Blog post: 07 December 2011

I-Room in Unity3D with Multi-User Chat, VoIP and Collaboration Tools

A number of people are investigating Unity3D as a 3D graphics engine for virtual worlds. It can be delivered through a web browser on a range of platforms including mobile devices. It might offer a light weight alternative to Second Life and OpenSim.

I have created a simple I-Room from scratch, built that into a complex Unity3D terrain and incorporated very simple avatars as an exercise in learning about Unity3D. I have also experimented with two different multi-user server addons - SmartFox Pro and Photon. I have embedded the Unity3D virtual world view into a web page alongside collaboration widgets to provide Twitter following of a given #tag, VoIP via Tokbox, and a Dabbleboard for showing presentations and giving a shared whiteboard. The demo systems are all available via http://www.aiai.ed.ac.uk/~ai/unity/

Even better, there are a number of groups interested in content exchange from OpenSim to Unity3D. An example is the recent conversion of the OpenVCE collaboration region which was originally on the Second Life VCE region, ported to OpenSim and then converted through Tipodean's Collada Converter for use in Unity3D. It is now available for use under the flexible Lesser GPL licence.



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Blog post: 27 October 2011

John McCarthy - Pioneer of AI

You may have heard that John McCarthy died this week. See

- http://news.stanford.edu/news/2011/october/john-mccarthy-obit-102511.html
- http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2011/oct/25/john-mccarthy

John was an early pioneer of AI, inventor of Lisp, and indeed originator of the term "AI" in 1956. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_McCarthy_(computer_scientist). It is good to see how broad and expansive John McCarthy's vision for computing was:

> From Wikipedia: In 1961, he was the first to publicly suggest (in a speech given to celebrate MIT's centennial) that computer time-sharing technology might lead to a future in which computing power and even specific applications could be sold through the utility business model (like water or electricity).

Take a look also at his short sci-fi story "The Robot and the Baby" for some great fiction (or is it?) about future robotics. See

- http://www-formal.stanford.edu/jmc/robotandbaby/robotandbaby.html

I worked with John both before and after his formal retirement, and it was a very enjoyable experience. His interest in formalising the notion of "context" was his most recent work which I spoke to him about. The ability to "assert that the proposition p is true in the context c" is a key to much of what we do in planning... and my own work some 30 years ago was involved with something I called "functions in context" that had similar aims.

Keywords:

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Blog post: 16 November 2011

John McCarthy – The Robot and the Baby

Professor John McCarthy died on 24th October 2011 at the age of 84. He was an early pioneer of computer technology, computer time-sharing, and inventor of LISP, one of the very first computer programming languages. LISP was, radically, based on symbolic computing. He was an early pioneer of Artificial Intelligence, and indeed originator of the term "AI" which was adopted following the title he gave to a conference at Dartmouth College in Vermont which John convened in the summer of 1956. John received the Turing Award, and many other accolades and honours, including the United States National Medal of Science.

John McCarthy was known to many of us in the Artificial Intelligence community as the "Father of AI", and I came to know him as very much a baby in the subject. In my student days in the early 1970s he appeared on the BBC TV program "Controversy" in debate with Sir James Lighthill on the value of research on general purpose robots alongside my PhD supervisor, Donald Michie, himself an AI pioneer and war time code breaker who had worked with Alan Turing at Bletchley Park. He wrote and communicated widely on his interests in robot decision making.

Typical of John's desire to communicate about his field was a short sci-fi story he wrote in 2001, "The Robot and the Baby" which has many interesting themes, and to me epitomises his breadth of interests, politics and fascinating opinions. A capable companion robot – "Robot Model number GenRob337L3, serial number 337942781--R781 for short" – was one of many deployed to assist people and deliberately made unappealing and emasculated by the constraints society had placed on robot use.

The story begins:

> "Mistress, your baby is doing poorly. He needs your attention."
> "Stop bothering me, you ..." ... "Love the ... baby, yourself."

John amusingly includes a long line of reasoning by R781 in the bracketed notation of LISP on probabilities of the baby being harmed if it disobeys its key constraints:

```
(= (Command 337) (Love Travis))
(True (Not (Executable (Command 337))) (Reason (Impossible-for robot (Action Love))))
(Will-cause (Not (Believes Travis) (Loved Travis)) (Die Travis))
(= (Value (Die Travis)) -0.883)
(Will-cause (Believes Travis (Loves R781 Travis) (Not (Die Travis))))
…
```

With this reasoning R781 decided that the value of simulating loving Travis and thereby saving its life was greater by 0.002 than the value of obeying the directive to not simulate a person. There follows a progressively escalating series of events where the whole world is watching the handling of the situation by the authorities, and commenting in real time on the event on social media - anticipating Twitter by some years.

Read the story (at http://www-formal.stanford.edu/jmc/robotandbaby.html) if you want to explore an informed opinion on the ethics, issues and dilemmas involved in human and robot interaction, which one day we may face. The story has many thought provoking elements. I personally feel for the emasculated robot that is left in the Smithsonian.

Keywords:

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The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Summary

Summary

To conclude this presentation, I include a blog posting reflecting back on the aims I original described for participation in the MSc in e-Learning, and a nice round up post showing all IDEL11 participants finally meeting "face-to-face" in Adobe Connect.

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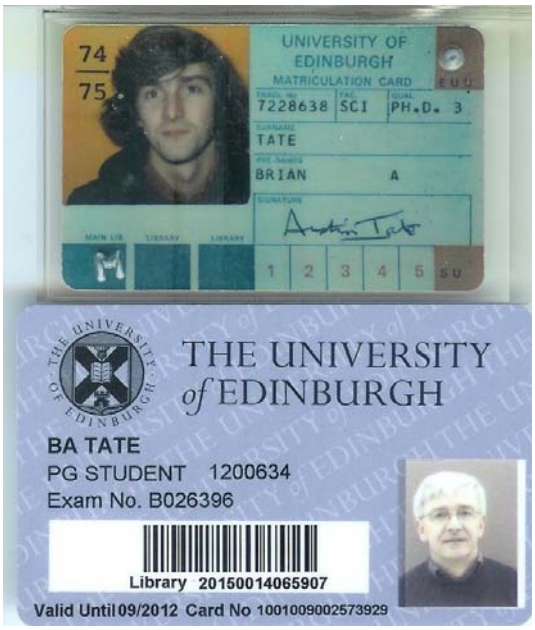
Blog post: 02 December 2011

Reflections at the End of the IDEL11 Course

At the very start of the course I did a blog post to set down some of my objectives for engaging on the MSc in e-Learning. See http://holyroodpark.net/atate/weblog/6132.html

It has been a fascinating experience joining in and seeing things as a student. Going through the EUCLID application process was also useful to do. I had a few glitches but the support to sort them out worked very well indeed and was very quick. I really had to get references and degree certificate copies to support my application. I then realized that even as a University of Edinburgh staff member I needed to apply for a grant to pay my fees.. times have changed. Its also fun to have a student card again after 40 years. I had longer hair in those days.



Becoming a learner again with directed reading lists after so long setting my own research reading agenda was enlightening. It took me quite some time to settle down to get on top of the volume of reading involved.. though I am on three courses this first Semester which did not help. But once I had some target artifacts to produce and themes in mind, my usual more applied focus kicked in and the readings became much more interesting.

The IDEL11 and Digital Cultures courses have allowed me to be introduced to and use a very wide variety of educational technology, or collaborative social media in an educational setting. This has been very useful indeed as my research focus is on the use of social media to support rich collaboration in communities such as for emergency responders. The tools used are similar, and the communities have exercise and training needs that are educational in nature. When I look back over the course period and think of how many tools and variants I have used it is astonishing. My blog shows the breadth of involvement with many of them, and the depth with a few such as the Moodle open source Virtual Learning Environment.

The in depth look at Moodle 2.x via mounting and administering a Moodle site was interesting, and is now in use by people in Informatics, Education , a PhD student looking at intelligent learning environments, and the person responsible for VLE discussion at Science and Engineering College level. This is useful early access and experience given the likely adoption of Moodle for distance learning support in the University.

My research interest in collaboration for training and exercise support for communities involved in emergency response was mainly supported by readings undertaken on the Understanding Learning in On-line Environments (UOL11) course and I have chosen to do my essay on that course in an area of scenario-based education and the psychological studies on "the Power of Stories" which is helping me achieve a deeper understanding of some of the reasons why simulation-based training can work so well in some intrinsically motivated communities.

This has been a most interesting course and experience, and I am very grateful for all the enthusiasm and support offered by Christine Sinclair my tutor, the other tutors on IDEL11, and the great level of interaction by all I have worked with on the MSc in e-Learning modules to date.

Keywords:

1 Comments (+/-)

1. I have always enjoyed the juxtaposition of your student reflections with your professional ones, and the way the perspectives influence each other. It does seem as though a different angle provides a new "take" on an issue, something I also discovered as a student on the same course. Working through so many activities and different kinds of spaces for a new purpose has provided valuable insights on the nature of those activities, technological affordances and channels of communication. I'm certain that your own communities are benefiting from the enhanced perspective - just as your professional background has had much to offer the participants in *this* environment.

   Times may have changed and hair got shorter (love the photos - I have similar ones!) but you have clearly retained an essential curiosity about the world and how it operates. I'm looking forward to reading your assignment about VLEs and PLEs. Your analysis from a pedagogic perspective should prove a great complement to anything you might be doing from a technological one.

   Christine Sinclair on Friday, 02 December 2011, 13:38 UTC

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The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 03 December 2011

Finally, We Meet

An amusing aspect of the IDEL11 course is that we have worked rogether for nearly three months and never really seen anything other than tiny icons of one another. So it was nice to finish up by finally "meeting" all my classmates and tutors "face-to-face" as it were in Adobe Connect...

Pictures provided courtesy of Rory Ewins.

Keywords:

2 Comments (+/-)

1. Although these meetings gave us more information about each other, there were some different responses to the experience to your own. Some reported finding it weird and troublesome - especially because of stilted conversations. This would inevitably disappear over time, with growing comfort with the medium (as you observed yourself) but while it is still at the "uncanny" phase for some, is there anything we can say about presence? I agree with your assessments about amusing and nice – I have a similar reaction – but why should that be? Does the amusement come because it is against the natural order of things to meet people through asynchronous then synchronous writing, tweeting, avatars... and finally, talking heads? I found meeting fellow graduands and tutors in the flesh both amusing and fascinating - and yes still slightly disturbing as more adjustments ensued.

   I wondered in particular what you are now thinking about voice. I can't remember who it was that struggled with Frank's morphed voice in SL, but that – combined with Anabel's response to "hearing" voices on the discussion board after the Connect session – has certainly started me questioning some of my assumptions and responses again! I see this tendency to stimulate questions as one of the strengths of this course. I think you mentioned voice earlier in your blog; I'll remind myself later!

   Christine Sinclair on Tuesday, 06 December 2011, 13:20 UTC

2. On presence, I was pleased to see that Adobe Connect had the typing ahead indication for those in typing mode... as that is a feature I feel helps a LOT with text chat. Its been available in Second Life for some time as you know. It really helps in maintaining thread awareness and waiting your turn when multiple conversations are being merged into a single linear thread of incoming messages.

   It was me who got thrown by Frank Lassard's morphed avatar voice due to my real world knowledge and hence assumptions. So I associated the voice with another avatar as it was such as strong assumption, which overrode the fact that there were clear Second Life viewer interface presence indications (green bars) and voice widget icons for who was actually speaking.

My previous blog entry for this was my Week 10 summary at http://atate.org/mscel/archive/hp-blog-2011.html

Austin Tate on Tuesday, 06 December 2011, 13:28 UTC

Imported at: 06/12/2011 13:29 UTC
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IDEL11 - Austin Tate's Presentation

IDEL11 - Austin Tate's Presentation

I began the IDEL11 course and my involvement with the MSc in e-Learning by using the discussion forums, blogs and WallWisher walls to introduce myself to tutors and classmates. I was inspired by the WallWisher wall concept to create a personal Life Wall at http://atate.org to bring much of the material together. Much of the introductory content I chose was about collaborative projects or communities I have been involved in as that appeals to me.

Themes that ran throughout the course include the following:

- Introducing Myself - "Life Wall" - experiments in using tags and clippings related to myself... and inspired by the introductions and WallWisher boards used on MSc in e-Learning courses.
- Collaborative Art and Media
- Educational Technology Experiments - Moodle, SLoodle, Intelligent Classrooms, etc.
- Explorations of VLEs and PLEs
- Avatar Identity in Virtual Worlds - Immersive "Other Worlds" for training and fun
- Virtual Worlds for Collaboration - especially involvement with the open source communities engaged in these areas.
- Distributed Collaboration and Tool Support - e.g. Wikis, Sync and Async Requirements
- Wider Engagement

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Introduction and My Interests

Introduction and My Interests

In the first section I introduce myself, my virtual worlds avatar and on-line personality "Ai Austin", and give links to more information about me and my work and interests:

- http://www.aiai.ed.ac.uk/~bat/
- http://www.aiai.ed.ac.uk/~ai/

I began the IDEL11 course and my involvement with the MSc in e-Learning by using the discussion forums, blogs and WallWisher walls to introduce myself to tutors and classmates. I was inspired by the WallWisher wall concept to create a personal Life Wall at http://atate.org to bring much of the material together. Much of the introductory content I chose was about collaborative projects or communities I have been involved in as that appeals to me.

I attach a number of blog entries made available in weeks 0 and 1 of the course to show some of my interests to others.

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Blog post: 14 September 2011

Introducing Austin Tate and Ai Austin

Let me introduce myself.. Austin Tate ... and my virtual worlds avatar... Ai Austin

Taking MSc modules for Semester 1 of 2011: "Introduction to Digital Environments for Learning", "e-Learning and Digital Cultures" and "Understanding Learning in On-line Environments".

Keywords:

Imported at: 19/09/2011 15:18 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 19 November 2011

Recollections of the first few years of the net

While reading Bell (2001) I was reminded of the time in the late 1960s and early 1970s when cyberculture was beginning.. and how quickly it grew after basic computer access and communication became possible. We are social beings. Let me recall a few things as stepping stones.

My own use of computers began in the days before networks were seriously developed. Computers were largely standalone big machines in air cooled facilities. My first programming exercises at a night class at Leeds Polytechnic around 1967 were submitted on coding sheets via punch operators on punched cards and the turn round was one week to the next evening class.

Things improved when I went to the University at Lancaster in 1969... we could punch our own cards :-) and then leave them in pigeon holes to be run overnight on the University's single ICL 1900 computer. A mistake in the program due to a simple typo was a no no if you wanted to get a result. We could program via flip switches in octal code a DEC PDP-8 that was the size of a large upright fridge freezer. I write some interrupt routines for a disc driver on a a basic operating system using a limit of 1K words of memory on that around 1970.

But things were changing and interactive access to the same type of computer was coming thanks to a link up between Edinburgh University AI people and Malcolm Atkinson, then the Computer Manager at Lancaster, and since then a long term colleague, co-investigator and recently Director of the National e-Science Centre based in Edinburgh. A precocious 17 year old programmer called John Scott at Lancaster wrote a real time access version of the Edinburgh POP-2 Language for the ICL 1900 and we were away into the cyberworld for real. We learned POP-2 for most of our programming exercises, for data structures, and for a new AI course at Edinburgh around 1970-1971 which I signed onto. These, and the consequent links to Edinburgh researchers interested in planning using computers set the direction for my whole career. With encouragement from Donald Michie and Jim Doran at Edinburgh I did a final year undergraduate project to build my first AI planner - Graph Traverser 4 - and used a "compilation" approach to how plans were composed. I applied it to a range of benchmark tasks that others had tried their planners on. It far outperformed the others. In July 1972 I was able to get a small grant to allow my continued work on this and its writeup to continue after my degree - my very first research grant!

Donald Michie in Edinburgh had offered me a PhD place at Edinburgh and I joined him at the Department of Machine Intelligence and Perception in October 1972. Real time access terminals using POP-2 and the time sharing Multi-POP system were the order of the day. But it was to be an exciting time...

Within a year the DEC-10 that was used by all AI researchers across Britain was installed in Edinburgh and became connected to the ARPANet - it was the 6th or 7th node on that network. Our access terminals could now be used to "Telnet" across to log on to other DEC-10s. I especially used the Stanford machine. There was rudimentary chat, and e-mail was started with the famous "@" character being used to address users on other hosts. Working for the first 2 hours each morning UK time I was often one of the few people on the entire network and had access to 2 DEC-10s for my work. Multi-User Dimensions (MUDs) were experimented with soon after in the machine I used at Stanford... and the rest is history...

Reference

Bell, D (2001) "Storying cyberspace 1: material and symbolic stories", chapter 2 of *An introduction to cybercultures*. Abingdon: Routledge. pp6-29.

[Repost of Blog Entry dated 28-Sep-2011 - to allow for inclusion in Introductory Section of IDEL11 Blog Presentation]

Keywords:

3 Comments (+/-)

1. Malcolm Atkinson added some more detail and the real facts in a message to me today…

   The machine at lancaster when you were there was an ICL 1909 with 32K 24-bit words and 4 tape decks. Jobs were submitted on punch cards.

   Andrew Colin and I added a exchangeable disk store holding 2 Megabytes. The drive cost £40K, half from EPSRC (then SRC) and half from the computer board, as a consequence of the Flower's report (his first I think — Peter Buneman's step dad) and we implemented a batch operating system taking 2K words, called June after the head operator, that then ran the batch service you allude to. Once we had done that, as we streamed input and output vi two of the tape decks, the rate of handling small jobs was much improved.
   With Wallace Anderson and Andy Lister, we bought a PDP8 (8K of 18-bit words?) and attached 8 teletypes to it, using it as a multiplexor and text editor, with a maximum of 256 words/teletype for the editable text buffer. We connected it to the ICL1909, and you could edit and submit jobs to it. That was working by late 1969 before I returned to Cambridge.

   I think there was another PDP8 obtained later for teaching; perhaps that is the one you used via its keys; although the replacement machine (which I had arranged to be a PDP10 and which was another ICL machine) ran a new ICL operating system: George 3, and all our work was discontinued. I worked on the DEC10 writing the POP-2 system for it with Ray Dunn for Donald Michie's round table, and was already hooked.

   The Computer manager was Wallace Anderson, he later went to Aberdeen to be computer services director there.

   I was a PDRA for a year and then a lecturer in the Maths department, under Elwyn Lloyd. Andrew & I designed the CS course, got it off the ground, and then did a UDI from Maths.

   John Scott did most of the ICL POP2 compiler. He who entered a chess program as a schoolboy, running on our 1909, versus Greenblatt's (?) chess program running on the MIT system, at the Machine Intelligence Workshop, 1968.

   My initial experience with interactive systems was with Cambridge Titan & Digital's DEC 10. At that time the DMIP mindset was paper-tape in and out of an Elliot 1409. I used the Timesharing service on the DEC10 run by Timesharing Ltd in Tottenham Court Road via an acoustically coupled modem that the GPO would not approve of from my house in the country in Dolphinholme. After an hour or two, I would get the teletype covered with splodges because an operator in the Morcambe manual exchange would have heard the weird noise, when wondering why the call was so long and listening in; she would then be plaintively asking "Is there anyone there?" sometimes generating or corrupting characters.

   EMAS was much later.

   We wrote about the Lancaster operating systems in the Computer Bulletin.

   Thanks for the chance to reminisce…

   Austin Tate on Saturday, 19 November 2011, 09:54 UTC

2. Oh..I remember those accoustic dial up modems too. 10 characters per second .. could put the entire phone headset into it and close the foam filled lid to improve the signal quality… size of a shoe box.

   And my PhD thesis in 1975 was typed on a 10cps teletype that output paper tape in the Machine Intelligence Research Unit in Hope Park Square at Edinburgh. Typing mistakes were quicker to fix by splicing in the punched out holes and manually punching the new ASCII character code.

   Austin Tate on Saturday, 19 November 2011, 09:55 UTC

3. *Siân Bayne* - October 4, 2011 at 15:06 - says:
   This is a fantastically direct and personal 'material story' to go alongside Bell's. You need to write a memoir - the fact that in the early days you were the first person to log on to the 'internet' in the morning is mind-boggling! Thanks for this Austin.

   Austin Tate on Saturday, 19 November 2011, 09:55 UTC

Imported at: 19/11/2011 09:56 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 15 September 2011

Ghosts of a Chance - All Eyes

My interests include 3D/CGI modelling (useful backgound for my interests in using Virtual Worlds), and graphic art. I very much like team projects and collaborative working, and have loved working in teams scattered across the globe on my projects and in my recreational interests. I hope to share some of these interests with you, and frankly to get an excuse to show some of the resulting artworks, through these blog entries.

In 2008 there was a number of web-based collective artworks created and shows at the Smithsonian American Art Museum's Luce Foundation Center. One called "ghosts of a chance " invited people to submit representations of eyes... photos, drawings, graphical concepts, etc. They were composed together and displayed in the final artwork... "All Eyes"...

Click on image for the full picture. See if you can find the one I submitted.

Keywords:

Imported at: 16/09/2011 07:20 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 15 September 2011

Supercar in Full Flight

This is the 3D model created in the 1990s of Supercar in collaboration between myself and Mick Imrie. Mick is the expert modeller. I did some simple Black Rock Lab buildings rather than the core vehicle. The model has been used in many digital environments since it was created, and now can be imported via the Collada model format into Second Life and OpenSim. The models are available at http://www.aiai.ed.ac.uk/~bat/GA/supercar-3d.html

Here is Supercar in full flight in OpenSim... My other car is a Toyota :-)

Keywords:

Imported at: 18/09/2011 21:14 UTC
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Blog post: 13 September 2011

AI in the Movies - Discussion on The Terminator Film at the Edinburgh International Film Festival 2011

http://www.eusci.org.uk/podcasts/eusci-podcast-extra-conversation-ai-researchers

At the 2011 the Edinburgh International Film Festival, one of the events was a screening of the 1984 scifi classic The Terminator. The event was followed by a discussion with two real-life AI researchers from the University of Edinburgh School of Informatics. We managed to catch the two scientists before the event and talk to them about the past and future of AI, its perception in the media, and whether we should worry about the Robot Apocalypse.

Listen to our conversation with:

- Austin Tate, Professor of Knowledge-Based Systems
- Sethu Vijayakumar, Professor of Robotics

Keywords:

Imported at: 16/09/2011 07:20 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 15 September 2011

I-Room - a Virtual Space for Intelligent Interaction

One of my reseaerch interests is in the creation of "intelligent" meeting spaces for interaction between people and systems. The programme is called the "I-Room". More details are at: http://openvce.net/iroom

Let Ai Austin take you on a short tour of an I-Room through this YouTube video...

Keywords:

Imported at: 16/09/2011 07:19 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 19 September 2011

Life Wall

I have been inspired by the WallWisher and ideas for creative media in some of the course guides for the MSc in e-Learning... and have begun to think of ways to explore the use of tags and clippings to let someone tell their life story in unstructured, time line and narrative ways.

I wanted to look at the idea of your life in 2 x HD screens of display space. My trial setup is called 2 x HD x bat (my initial and long time computer login name). Spoken in a spelled out way as "two" "times" "h" "d" "times" "b" "a" "t".

More details are at http://atate.org/life-about.html

Keywords:

Imported at: 19/11/2011 10:25 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 22 September 2011

Life Wall Pro - and Refinements - and the Baby Pictures

The elements of the Life Wall have been encouraging me to dig out all sorts of stuff that was buried away, and recall events and dates (sometimes with the aid of my wife and others) which were already only dimly there. But they have been brought back to vivid life through developing my personal Life Wall. I assume everyone will want photos of them when very young on their Life Wall... there are few events in life as important as being born! The baby photos of me at a few months old and age 1 year are up there now. Did I look cute then?

The live Life Wall is at http://atate.org - Hover a mouse over a tag or clipping for more detail. Click on the thumbnails for some larger versions of the images.

Life Map

I had already added a link to a "Life Map" on which I think a lot of life's experiences could be noted through places visited and dated events. I feel this element of the Life Wall could be so valuable, that I have adjusted the clippings column that will map to one HD screen of presentation to allow for an embedded Life Map directly on the main display. There is a link to a larger map which could then be shown over 2 X HD displays when clicked.

Life Wall Pro

The Life Wall idea and presentation could also be adapted to professional purposes, e.g. to collect together and present a researcher's entire scientific contribution. It could allow then to look at their work and relationships. They could bring in professional contacts and the mappings between people, projects, organisations, tools, etc. Displays could include professional social network and project relationship diagrams (e.g. CMU Catalyst), FOAF, knowledge asset roadmaps (Macintosh, Filby and Tate, 1998), etc. I am developing this aspect now. As for Life Map Personal I hope to make the approach reasonably general and create an empty life map web area which other can copy and adapt to use themselves.

Reference:

Ann Macintosh, Ian Filby and Austin Tate (1998) "Knowledge Asset Road Maps" Proc. of the 2nd Int. Conf. on Practical Aspects of Knowledge Management (PAKM98) Basel, Switzerland, 29-30 Oct. 1998, (U. Reimer, ed.). Available from http://www.aiai.ed.ac.uk/project/oplan/documents/1998/98-pakm98-roadmaps.pdf

Keywords:

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The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Objectives and Pre-Course Experience

Objectives and Pre-Course Experience

In this section, I note the objectives I set out with, and some of my experience in the first week 0 of the courses. I make notes about joining the community, getting up to speed quickly with the technology in use.

At the very end of the Presentation I wiol return to reflect on these objectives and my experience on the IDEL11 and other Semester 1 courses on the MSc in e-Learning

Top

Blog post: 15 September 2011

Personal Aims for Participating in the MSc in e-Learning

I will note these here to return to them nearer the end of the course to see if they are valid and how I change in my view of what I am seeking... but also to see if my objectives are being met.

- I wish to learn more about and make use of educational technology and methods for distance education delivery, assessment and community participation.
- I want to see the experience of distance education from the perspective of a student.
- I like a challenge and a clear target. An MSc is an achievable and valuable target. I do not currently have a Masters degree.
- I have a role as Coordinator for the Virtual University of Edinburgh, and an interest in educational and tutoring technology.
- I have a new role as Coordinator for Distance Education in the School of Informatics.
- I also have a research interest in collaboration for training and exercise support for communities involved in emergency response. See http://www.aiai.ed.ac.uk/project/plan/
- Interest in technology for the social web.
- I have a suitable window of opportunity since my teaching duties are suspended for 2011/12 as part of arrangements within my School for a sabbatical which I partially took in 2010/11 while keeping all duties.

Keywords:

Imported at: 28/11/2011 11:11 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 15 September 2011

Reflections on Week 0 - Joining, Issues and Orientation

Joining

Well... from applying to participating took 3 days. Thanks to some very cooperative colleagues in the School of Education. I was wondering if they might not take well to having a colleague join in as a student. But they have been very welcoming indeed. Thanks to Hamish, Sian, Rory, Clara and Jen especially in the setup period and for rapidly answering all the queries that flooded their way.

Money

Money reared its ugly ahead. I naively assumed staff members of the University could register for courses free like we used to be able to do some years ago. But times have moved on. Money must flow between business centres now. What a pain. As before colleagues in Education, the Institute for Academic Development, College and Central have been VERY supportive in looking for creative solutions. I do want to take the MSc as a genuine student and feel a target of an MSc is both achievable and valuable. And I want to do this seriously. I thought I would end up spending more time on this aspect than studying when asked to go through the hoops for what could essentially be a zero sum game. But no, by the end of the first week, we had confirmation of support at all levels and funding is to be found from the seed funds for distance education development in the University. Very good news indeed, and most encouraging. Good to know the University is still focused on really getting things done and can respond in an agile way.

Technology

There is a LOT of technology in use... maybe a necessary part of this type of course so we come across all sorts of different synchronous and asynchronous. But really there was a LOT. I have had to make a web page to remember the URLs, already have a list of user names and password... not all are EASE single sign on accessible. I have signed up for so many new services this week, and I was

already a member of many of the popular ones to be used on the MSc. At one stage I even ended up with two accounts on one service.

Eventually though, with a bit of tutor guidance and a few well chosen questions to my tutors I find that there are really only 3 main links:

Holyrood Park Hub: http://www.elearning.education.ed.ac.uk (for all course materials and links)

MyWebCT via MyEd with EASE Login: https//www.myed.ed.ac.uk (for my specific courses)

Holyrood Park Weblog: http://holyroodpark.net/atate/weblog

Who are you?

And I got called Brian again.. my first name happens to be Brian. EASE did that. only my doctor and dentists call me Brian and I have stopped trying to correct them.

Family Relationships

My wife is sceptical and can see this as yet another life, beyond my first and second lives :-)

New Friends and Colleagues

I love collaborative work, and enjoy distance relationships for working and playing together. Its great to see the geographical spread and mix of people. I will see if the participants take to me putting in some personal stuff on collective digital artworks and some of my other interests,. But be ready to back off if its like talking about *cats* - see week 1 assignment "The Black Hole" - I cannot resist looking ahead.

Am I Overdoing the Contributions?

Then towards the weekend, I start to have serious concerns, growing with each e-mail I send to the tutors and each posting I make. I have read ahead a bit to some week 1 assignments and enjoyed making input on some stories from the experience of others on distance education courses. The "Black Hole" particularly rang a bell with me, so I added a comment. Then realised it is maybe premature as it is for week 1 work. I consider deleting it. But end up adding comments on other stories as I read them. Then I realise I have nothing to add on one story about "The Loner". I keep coming back to it, wondering what to add, and even whether to reply to a comment already there

Then... I start to get paranoia about comments from a tutor in the course forums that they hope things settle down next week and that other quiet folks should be encouraged versus the vocal ones. I am not normally paranoid... but since I already was worried I was perhaps putting too much in and asking too many questions, I can see I am part of the problem. I resolve to read more and comment less. Then worry that may not be great for assessment purposes! Then I feel glad I did NOT add an entry where I had nothing to say about "The Loner" story. Ah, such is paranoia. But I am sure I will get over it :-)

Keywords:

2 Comments (+/-)

1. There is so much fascinating material already in your blog, Austin, that I wondered about which point was most appropriate for me to come in. This entry resonated with my own experiences so much that I've decided to start here. Because I've only been here a couple of weeks as a lecturer myself, I've been through all the different logins and routes and the huge range of passwords needed – and had come to similar conclusions to you about distilling down the most important entry points.

   It is very rewarding to see all these issues from a student perspective and I undertook the MSc myself to find out what it was like being an online student. (I didn't expect that I'd like it so much I'd end up being a lecturer on the course - but I'm delighted at how it's turned out.) I too worried about how I was perceived and frequency of contributions - but I now think that some version of this paranoia is common to most students. I've been asking students for many years what they look forward to and what concerns they have about university life: the most common answers - to both questions - seems to be meeting others and getting on with the work. Money has in recent years become a major third concern. But the overwhelming questions seem to be "will I be able to do it?" and "will I fit in?"

   I like the way you have put down markers here about your concerns and, in the following entry, about your aspirations. You are right that it will be very interesting to return to these entries later on and see what you make of them in the light of subsequent experiences.

   I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to be tutor to such an interesting blogger and know that I'm going to learn a lot from you! There are already some links that I want to follow up when I really should be getting on with something else. I look forward to our dialogues; I probably won't comment on every entry but that won't mean that I'm not reading them or not interested.

   Christine Sinclair on Monday, 19 September 2011, 14:09 UTC

2. Thanks Christine. Shows we are BOTH not REALLY paranoid then.

   Focus is an issue... and I note it mostly when I have to settle down to do one solid bit of reading and commenting, so I know I will have to watch that.

   But there really are so many things going on in this interesting space that its difficult not to get distracted by trying them out.

   Austin Tate on Monday, 19 September 2011, 14:48 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 11:45 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Week-by-Week

Week-by-Week

In this section, I include my "Reflections" Blog postings on a week-by-week basis.

Top

Blog post: 16 September 2011

Reflections on Week 1.1 - EUCLID, Using Tools and Looking Right Ahead

EUCLID Experience

I applied last week on EUCLID having been asked to do a formal application by the College Office. The whole process was pretty smooth. It provided good feedback to students at all stages. It was good to see this process from a student perspective. I was given an e-mail with a "continuation" link right at the first stage which was reassuring. But I did have a glitch after 6 of the 8 or so steps and Internet Explorer refused to continue with messages about cookies not being enabled (when they were). This persisted for a few attempts and alternative routes to recover, so I had to give up.

Then when I came to use the e-mailed continuation link, it would not let me login with the credentials given. This was some half an hour after they had been mailed. I contact the IS help desk who very quickly came back (even at 9pm at night - Yan). he explained that the username setup can take some time. A long delay like that is not something anyone would expect. It may be worth warning EUCLID applicants of this in the e-mail they are sent we initially applying.

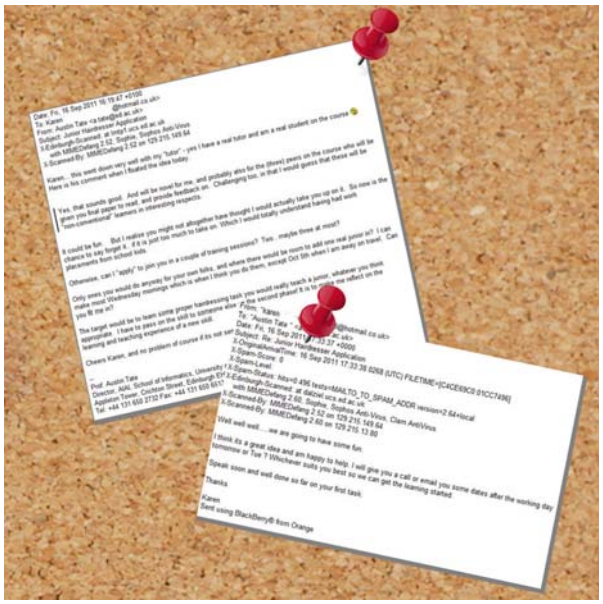
One process issue I spotted was at the point where a student place was offered and accepted. Up to then, the e-mail address provided on application is used for all correspondence, and to tell you items are waiting in EUCLID. It seems that at the point of registration the process establishes a student e-mail address - in my case s1200634@sms.ed.ac.uk - and e-mails get send there. My matriculation details and form for example were sent there. But as you have no indication e-mail is going to a new account you lose communication. The process should at least inform you when a student e-mail account is set up for you. The setting up of a forwarding filter is itself a technical process which some students might find difficult at first. I made a mistake in writing the regular expression rule and took 3 attempts to get a forward attempt to work. An improvement to the process would be to set up the SMS student account with a default filter rule that also forwards the mail to the originally provided applicant's e-mail address.

Learning Challenge on Understanding Learning Course

I have some fun thinking about this one. I had been considering an appropriate and suitably interesting, challenging and achievable learning task... I was intrigued to see that motor skills can be considered as well as more cognitive knowledge-based tasks. So I was considering a range of things when I happened to be at the hairdresser and a new junior was being assisted by a senior colleague while she washed my hair. That got me thinking...

Speaking with the senior stylist there, a L'Oreal I.D. Expert, who I happen to know is one of the top hairdressers trainers in Scotland, and an award winner, I asked what a junior hairdresser can expect to learn in their first training periods and how long such training takes. We chatted about the initial skills: hair washing; customer interaction; blow drying; colour removal; colouring; etc. Training typically takes place on a half day when the salon is closed, and practiced on dummies, and colleagues. And the taken into the salon gradually. We chatted more and I explained about the learning challenge. I could sense an opportunity.

I think this might be a novel and fun challenge. Quite different to what I normally do. Involving interaction with different people. The Stylist thought it would be cute to have a skill where I could offer to professional blow dry my wife's hair. When I mentioned this to my wife she said she would prefer me to get a motor skill like ironing, cooking or painting windows! She also said that it was a good job I had not been to the dentist and suggested that as a learning challenge!



My "application" as junior hairdresser was accepted and my training sessions are set up for 19th and 26th October. I will be training initially on a dummy head. I will be given advance reading about brush shape and choice and the reasons to use different brushes. I am required to maintain a training log book. I am also told to arrive in smart casual clothing (better update my outfit with all those young things about) and expect to get hot.

Private Weblog... Really?

I have been using the Weblog to make notes on upcoming work, ideas, outline reports, etc. It is my approach to do outline far in advance of delivery dates. I am a natural list maker but relax as soon as things are on a list (its a known condition some call "Zygaric Stress"). But I really do want these to be private as they give away ideas I don't want to introduce, even to tutors, until the right time. I wonder who can peek in :-)

Tools

All week, I was still adding more and more web sites, tools, user names and passwords to get set up for the courses. There really are a LOT. I sugegsted that we establish a Twitter tag #msculoe for the Understanding Learning in the Online Environment course, which the course tutor approved.

I have not used the a.nnotate tool before to allow for discussion threads via post it style notes on papers. I think it works very well.

I was having trouble with http://holyroodpark.net/atate which did not seem to show all my posts. Ones posted in week 0 as introductions for example were not showing in my "All Posts" link, and cannot be found in the Search facility even when the exact post title is used. But a direct URL access for such posts is available where I have a record of that elsewhere. I reported this in the IDEL forums, and was advised to use the"Archive" link which does reach all your own posts.

Other Future Assignments

I have begun thinking ahead for assignments and possible topics. I like to get outlines I am comfortable with, and then spend some time collecting ideas, notes and materials. I don't like to be up against deadlines.

Ethnographic studies for IDEL: I wonder if I can use the 300 or so people that have registered on OpenVCE.net and involved in emergency response communities, suitably anonymised.

Essay Topics for Understanding Learning in On-line Environments. Possible areas could pick up on my interests in mixed initiative tutorial environments, and the process-product planning cycle (relate to Carroll's task-artifact cycle model - http://www.interaction-design.org/encyclopedia/task_artifact_cycle.html). We could contrast the mixed-initiative approach with purely top down teacher driven learning and bottom up student driven discovery (relate to "Zone of proximal development" by Vygotsky, at suggestion of Hamish Macleod - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zone_of_proximal_development). A theme of "mixed initiative approaches to distance education" might make a good theme to propose. It could explore the using the <I-N-C-A> model of sets of issues to address, activities to perform, constraints to maintain, and annotations/notes model for the production of educational materials, to define educational goals and their adaptive refinement to specific learner contexts. And perhaps look at a next generation of more effective intelligent learning environments which can use these to support those involved as tutors and students in distance education. This area might make a good lead in to the main dissertation.

Project for Digital Cultures Course - I have been experimenting with the idea of a "**Life Wall**" - your life in tags and clippings in unstructured and structured timeline forms for display on 2 X HD display screens. I spent some time getting a flow style sheet and outline web page that would work as I

want to let me explore ideas. I will blog about this separately as my ideas develop. For the Digital Cultures assessment, this Life Wall may perhaps be used to find a way to present an academic programme of research, its themes and areas of influence, the work that went into it, and the results, publications and applications impact that arose. Relate to programme "road maps".

Main Dissertation: I have made some notes on a possible dissertation area.

1. The area of "collaborative work over the Internet for work and play" could be promising... and would let me explore some of the case histories I have been involved in for both professional and recreational purposes. I once wrote a book with someone I never met until after it was published (Reading in Planning: Allen, Hendler and Tate). We have done much work with multi-national emergency response communities, especially via OpenVCE.net. Recreationally, we created many Gerry Anderson 3D modelling assets (GA-MMA) and Supercar assets between people scattered all round the globe.
2. Another possible area is the use of a virtual worlds classroom assistant that would be available in the classroom 24/7 and supportive of people using the room. It might use non-player character (NPC) technology just now appearing in OpenSim. It could link up and use chatbot technology (MyCyberTwin for example) with suitable FAQs, tutorial capability, etc. It might make use of the I-X helper. Care would be taken to ensure I focus on areas where I have done the development and concepts and development myself, such as in the area of virtual personalities using chat and NPC embodiment.
3. A serious possibility could be to look at mixed initiative interaction as a model for distance education. see notes under Understanding Learning above.

Money and Matriculation

Well the payment of fees got sorted out really quickly between the various parts of the University. I was most impressed. Will not be so cynical for a while. I also matriculated so I am now a fully fledged student and staff member simultaneously.

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 11:46 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 21 September 2011

Reflections on Week 1.2 - Work Proper

Now we are into the course proper... and a pattern of work has to be set that can be maintained. There are a number of web areas, WallWisher displays, blogs, discussion forums and WebCT work areas to be monitored. My computers are set up now with a page with the relevant links that I can step through in a regular way. I have also tested iPad use and can see what does and does not seem to work to be more efficient.

My colleagues on the courses have already started to help me in my own technology use, which shows part of the value of being in a new and vibrant community of interested and interesting folks.

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 11:47 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

Top

Blog post: 21 September 2011

Reflections on Week 2.1 - Readings, PDF and Publisher Restrictions on Access

I have now got more organised with the various core and secondary readings I need to do on my courses. PDF is handy as I can load it onto my iPad, and will be able to take it on my travels. I will be away for much of week 4, and that could be a good time to get on top of, or ahead on the readings. On-line access will be very limited as there is only cellular (expensive) access where I will be. I find the restrictive paid for subscriptions a total pain. A check out time on some of 1 day is ludicrous. Useless for those of us that travel. I suspect many distance learners will really be affected by this sort of thing. We should boycott such publishers and stick to open published works in PDF. When their citation counts drop through the floor that will stop them restricting academic access to academically produced material. Course tutors should try to avoid recommending works that are not openly accessible as stable PDF that does not time out.

Keywords:

2 Comments (+/-)

1. I think all of the course team is probably in favour of open access materials as far as possible but the world seems to be in a state of transition with regard to this. It's annoying when there is a reading that you know would be ideal but you can't get the appropriate permissions in place. But I'll certainly be bearing your comment here in mind as I get into setting up

courses. There are interesting political and pedagogic issues here with wider implications than our own course.

Christine Sinclair on Friday, 23 September 2011, 07:53 UTC

2. Thanks Christine... understood. I was on the copyright negotiation committee for AI Journal with Elsevier, so have had many years of this. I also established AIAI's publication policy when we were first formed in 1983 and since then for every publication we reserve the right to use as WE wish. That policy was also adopted by Informatics when we were formed. Our staff are not ALLOWED to assign copyright away for normal papers (except for commercial arrangements for their books, etc).

Austin Tate on Friday, 23 September 2011, 08:00 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 11:48 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 21 September 2011

Reflections on Week 2.2 - Reading Pace and Settling Down

Reading Pace and Settling Down

I had anticipated that settling down to read significant numbers of papers on academic topics would be a challenge for me. I know that I have a high work rate, but am so divided in my time on many concurrent tasks that concentration for a significant period on any one task can be a problem. For some time recently, I have set aside one day per week to work from home to manage this, and find I can catch up and clear these longer tasks, such as examinations, PhD reviews, academic paper reading and reviewing, etc.

I found that by the end of week 1 I had read, but not really absorbed, the required core reading, and some secondary readings for all the courses I am on in the MSc in e-Learning. I took the opportunity to read again some Wikipedia overviews on different schools of learning which acted as a useful summary. I also got more organised with the course core rand secondary readings making them available to myself as PDF without going into WebCT... which proves too much of a distraction with dozens of discussion messages coming in... which would easily distract me into interesting, but unfocussed, new work.

So, as I settled down to week 2 reading, with a bit more structure to the learning types that are in the literature, I started to make more notes in the margins and to extract content I found interesting. The very many secondary reading links, and new literature links that appear in the discussion forums is overwhelming for the early part of the course, but I think will progressively be of more value when a steady and sustainable work pace is set.

Keywords:

1 Comments (+/-)

1. Keeping up with the reading is quite difficult, especially when you are likely to make connections with all sorts of other readings of your own. I empathise with this as I'm having to do it for myself just now. Students rarely have sufficient time to do all the possible reading; there is always a sense that you could do more. Using an iPad will help the organisation I think. It also helps to create ways of focusing, as you are doing. I often tell students to read with a specific question in mind as it makes the reading more interesting - though I don't think lack of interest is an issue in your case!

   You quite often mention focus and I'm not surprised, with so much going on. We shall explore this topic in Week 11, under the heading of "Speed, Silence and Sanctuary". Are we losing something because of the "Tyranny of the moment" (Eriksen)? Getting the balance right between being strategic and contemplative is sometimes difficult. While I always claimed to be a genuine student (when people accused me of not being!) I did recognise that when you've been a student a few times you do learn that you can trust yourself with some processes, even at times when you feel overwhelmed and confused. That did give the mature student some advantages over the less experienced ones.

   I wish you all the best in finding your steady and sustainable work pace. I am confident that you will, even though it might not always feel so at the time!

   Christine Sinclair on Monday, 26 September 2011, 14:12 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 11:48 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 27 September 2011

Reflections on Week 2.3 - Balance, Push and Pull

Reading More Under Control

Having got a bit more organised with my reading I am just about on top of it at the end of week 2. I had time to read the papers ahead of a Skype chat in IDEL11 today and ready for an evening SyncTube chat for EDEDC11 later this evening.

I have found that as I develop some interests for possible essays on ULOE11, that I am making more sense of the readings on cognitive psychology approaches to learning, which before were washing over me. Reading with a purpose is always much more satisfying and useful.

As I am travelling now for over a week, I have looked ahead and got core readings and some secondary material in offline PDF reading formats to take with me for weeks 3 and 4.

Twitter - Push and Pull

I have been following the various searches on hash tags associated with the MSc in e-Learning overall (#mscel) and with the 3 modules I am on (#mscidel #msculoe #ededc) but the tools I am using are not good for keeping in touch. Tweetdeck was recommended by the Digital Cultures tutors and is great on the desktop, but, after Tweetdeck was purchased by Twitter themselves, the iPad verson has been deleted in favour of the Twitter's own app. Typical buy-to-close-down approach by the big boys. The multiple column feeds which could include searches as well as @name follows was good in Tweetdeck, but is unsupported in Twitter's own app. I will keep looking for a good tool - as its not realistic to keep manually checking all these feeds.

Keywords:

3 Comments (+/-)

1. You seem to be very well organised - as is necessary for so much multitasking. Your assignment ideas seem to be helping you to keep focused.

   I wasn't too sure where to put this observation, but wanted to reassure you about private spaces so your latest "restricted" entry seemed the best. I am conscious that in an earlier entry you expressed some concerns and so I checked this out. The only person who can see everything is Jen, because of her technical role - and she says she wouldn't look at anything meant to be private. I wouldn't want to see things either that are not intended; I find assessment demanding enough without that added complication!

   I am interested in the notion of the "backstage" (Goffman) and see it as having advantages and disadvantages online, some of which will not be clear to new bloggers. I personally like blogging for a "future self" because it reminds me of what was happening backstage - I sense you do too. But it may not be appropriate to show all the workings and there are many complex issues and theories associated with this, some of which will undoubtedly be coming up later.

   I'm very much enjoying reading your blog(s) and look forward to more on your return. We can perhaps start to explore some of these theoretical perspectives a little.

   Christine Sinclair on Friday, 30 September 2011, 10:16 UTC

2. I think I know what you mean about blogging for a "future self" but would very much like you to erlaborate on that ina few sentences in you have time.

   Thanks for the pointer to the frontstage/backstage prsentations of self work of Erving Goffman which I looked into - http://orgtheory.wordpress.com/2010/03/28/goffmans-front-and-backstages/ - I can relate to that.

   The "Private" blog messsages are not super sensiive. But they are places I am drafting notes and responses to some future assignments and don't necessarily want to give away some of my thinking yet :-) I am preparing my "act" backstage. I could of course just keep private notes in a different medium, but I like to stick to a common set of technologies to learn more of them and allow more effective exchange to the "frontstage" when I am ready. Between you and me I have already finished one module assignment (not on this course) due at week 5 time. I like to get ahead while I can and while I am on a roll. As there will be some weeks when I cannot do as much.

Austin Tate on Friday, 30 September 2011, 10:50 UTC

3. I undertook the MSc myself to research being an online student. It's a labour-intensive way of researching (all those essays!) and I now want to write up for publication some of the stuff I found. But I kept a public blog about it, which I have mined for information when I've been advising students (in my previous job) especially about academic writing. I wanted to capture the process of writing an assignment in all its messiness. I see that in the blog I refer to the blog itself as an extension of memory - and I think that is what I mean as well. Once we have successfully completed something, it is easy to forget the backstage. Yet online there can be traces of it. I wonder whether some of it *should* be forgotten - and I now wish I hadn't called the blog "confessions" in case it gives the message that people ought to confess. But I did want to show students that even experienced lecturers can struggle with the process of writing or understanding something new.

   I seemed to have a Chinese following on this blog - and Google translate suggests that their observations were not all of a pornographic nature (though some were!)

Christine Sinclair on Sunday, 02 October 2011, 09:34 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 11:48 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 28 September 2011

Reflections on Week 2.4 - Life Wall Dominates Word Count in my Blogs

A Wordle word scatter diagram of my blogs for IDEL11 on Holyrood Park and for EDEDC11 on edc11.education show that the work I did to create a "Life Wall" at http://atate.org/ has been my top focus in the first couple of weeks of the MSC in e-Learning. I very much like Wordle diagrams to show threads for work over a long period... and have used them for some years on my Publications sites at

- O-Plan Programme Publications - 1983 to 1999 - http://www.aiai.ed.ac.uk/project/oplan/documents/
- I-X Programme Publications - 1983 to present - http://www.aiai.ed.ac.uk/project/ix/documents/

Keywords:

1 Comments (+/-)

1. I love Wordle too, Austin - it does help expose what words are particularly significant to individuals and groups. It looks as though you're doing a sort of stock-take that will provide a useful basis for considering any changes that might occur during a programme of study. This is especially useful for someone with such a wide range of existing experience and knowledge - but others who see this might want to try it too. It can be helpful to find out what you're thinking/writing about!

Christine Sinclair on Thursday, 29 September 2011, 06:38 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 11:52 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 05 October 2011

Reflections on Week 3.1 - Looking into the Course through a Keyhole

Reading

I am travelling this week and in a location with no broadband or desktop computer. So, I planned to catch up on reading and perhaps get a little ahead. I find I am now wanting to get the paper out to read, making more notes and wishing I had more time to comment.

Through a Keyhole

When travelling like this, I usually use a mobile device and 3G wireless access and limit myself to basic e-mail and a few low bandwidth browser operations. I make notes and lists of things to do on my return. But the period of absence from Edinburgh was longer than usual this time, and thing can start to build up quickly. After a few days I find I am spending longer making notes on what I must do when I return than actually working on something productive. The (lack of) speed and (lack of) screen real estate becomes a serious problem for much of the type of work I do, but this week that was made more acute with the types of web pages and visual material in use on the MSc in e-Learning courses. The typical type of web page served by a CMS like WordPress, Drupal or Joomla, and even Twitter, is filled with images, thumbnails, and other bandwidth hungry elements, and if usually designed with style layouts which do not allow for progressive rendering. A blank page is offered while many many elements download and then the page appears some time later. These sorts of sites are almost unusable on a typical 3G connection independent of screen size... and this becomes especially frustrating if this is the bulk of the material being accessed. I quickly developed a sense that I was peering at the world through a very small key hole.

Keywords:

1 Comments (+/-)

1. The keyhole is an interesting idea - I sometimes have felt "locked out" of the university because of technical problems, which seems to be using the same metaphor. It can happen in Second Life too, and so can some surreal in-between stages as people feel they are half in and half out of the environment. These issues are worth thinking about for students who might be permanently in areas of low bandwith – how do we ensure that they are included? Or do we just say that they can't participate? There are some analogies here to the problems of disability; what is disabling – the condition or the environment in which people find themselves?

Christine Sinclair on Wednesday, 05 October 2011, 10:33 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 11:49 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 07 October 2011

Reflections on Week 3.2 - White Screens and Appropriate Social Media

Travel and White Screen

The week was characterised for me by being on travel and working with mobile devices and a slow 3G connection. It is a time to remember that not all our students and distance learners are on fast broadband networks, and every item of content, image and thumbnail download and reload for trivial clicks must be paid for. I experienced blank white browsers screens for over a minute while typical content management systems like WordPress composed their page for rendering... made up of hundreds of images and user icons.. and then showed it all at once.. immediately followed by some click to get you really where you want to be (like login prompt) followed by a total reload of every one of the same content items. These systems are poorly designed for bandwidth limited connections, mobile devices and so on. The systems seem not to have provided fall back styles, and forgotten the art of low bandwidth images, progressive rendering of pages with image and tables sizes predefined, etc.

Twitter, Discussion Forums and Blogs

I can continue to interact reasonably well with others I collaborate with via Twitter while on travel. Though not having a simple way to view new tweets to #tags is an issue... only supported in systems I have with TwitterDeck on my desktops. I will blog separatekly about experience this week of using Twitter for class discussions for IDEL11. Threaded discussion Forums are easier to follow, keep up to date with and input to, they can be looked back over indefinitely, searched, and new posts can easily be seen. I would say should be a preferred mode of operations for distance educators. Skype is okay if permitted in your location, but is bandwidth hungry, needs a 100% time connection (3G can drop out frequently in low signal areas), but not ideal for some topics that do not require synconicity. Blog posting are possible, but massive over use of images, header images and so on make this an expensive and time consuming frustrating process for the distance learner or user.

Reading and Comments

I did manage to get on top of core readings for my MSc in e-Learning modules and do some of the secondary reading.

Keywords:

1 Comments (+/-)

1. You are raising some important issues about access, accessibility and appropriate media. I also enjoyed your public entry about Twitter being "unfit for purpose" -you make some good points here. I personally liked the Twittorial more than I expected to but I was pleased to be able to go back over it later, as things happened too quickly for me to keep on top of it in terms of thinking more deeply about the issues raised.

   I have still to read the paper on Twitter that Clara posted; I'm interested in theoretical/pedagogic perspectives on the potential and actual uses of media. Hamish once said something that has stuck with me: the places we are appropriating for education are places that people are already using for other purposes - and they have their own purposes and ways of being. This is perhaps something that isn't always factored into institutional discussions about media.

Christine Sinclair on Monday, 10 October 2011, 10:46 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 11:53 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 07 October 2011

Reflections on Week 3.3 - Twitter for Class Discussions - Unfit for Purpose

I want to make some observations on the use this week of Twitter for the Edinburgh MSc in e-Learning IDEL11 class discussions about core readings and topics. Obviously one purpose is to test a variety of tools and modalities of interaction for distance education purposes, so I will give my experience as a student in this case.

Twitter is a valuable "push" short messaging and trending platform. Due to the volume of material appearing on it, lack of archiving facilities, lack of search over long periods and lack of good clustering methods in most tools it is unsuited to discussions which by their nature are threaded and need linearity in reading posts from multiple participants. The tweeter should not assume the group members see every (or even most) tweets, and there is no confirmation of what they have and have not seen.

Shortened URLs are frequently applied by tools when tweets are posted, and this loses much valuable context for the citation or reference given.

Public accessibility and possibly permanent online availability and reposting by others of the tweets also may preclude argumentation more suited to a closed audience or group.

Seeking to use Twitter to follow 4 #tags on 3 MSc in e-Learing courses is impractical on most Twitter interfaces, including the official Twitter.com provided web site and mobile apps. I found only TweetDeck for Desktop as recommended for the Digital Cultures course (but not the mobile versions of TweetDeck) suitable for such uses... but that is disruptive via its new tweet arrival notification mechanism when trying to concentrate on other work.

My use of Twitter was also on low bandwidth and error prone 3G connections, and using small screen mobile devices, but I think my observations are valid even without that limitation.

I found the threaded discussion forums on WebCT much easier to follow while travelling, and the times at which they can be checked and inputs given can be managed better and more asynchronously.

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 11:53 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 14 October 2011

Reflections on Week 4 - Feeling at Home in Second Life

This week felt very comfortable and familiar to me... as we were experimenting in Second Life and Virtual Worlds.

I took the introduction seriously, and attended the full session... and did the exercises. I tried not to appear too much as a smart alex when Frank Lassard and Pancha Enzyme were helping new users. Everyone did very well, as

I know its really tricky when people first start.. and the last thing they want is someone showing off too much.

I looked at the EduNation regions Second Life and commented on those areas and how they are set up as part of the set work fro IDEL11. There was time to read the core papers and one of the secondary readings ahead of a tutorial to discuss the content. the session, not surprisingly, was mostly taken up with help to people still getting to grips with Second Life. But some points about the paper were made, and I transferred the relevant points to the discussion forum on WebCT to archive.

ULOE11 was a cerebral week with lots of philosophy and cognitive psychology readings... I am getting through them gradually. Hundreds of discussion forum items need thought before responses. I am using my ideas on a essay topioc to focus my interest in these readings, makign notes as I go along.

Digital Cultures EDC11 was fun as usual... this week we were creating a digital artifact... and I went to town again... spending most of last weekend doing the backstop programming of new non-player character (NPC) and avatar cloning facilities in OpenSim to get a background for the artifact. Its a live "show" on the OpenSim-based Openvue grid. It has multiple layers of meaning for me and uses my usual mix of type and layout as well as imagery to convey my interests. I crated a wide variety of re-usable assets, e.g. portraits of my avatars in the various outfits I have used over the last 6 years, as part of the work. I created a rationale section and "in progress build" section to show how the artifact was created. the full information is at http://atate.org/ai/ai/ Commenting on the artifacts created by classmates is now ongoing for the rest of the week and weekend.

Background work on setting up a Moodle 2.x Virtual learning Environment at a server in AIAI has continued... as we needed to do background work to update our Apache/PHP/MySQL setup; Now that is done, we have a working up to date Moodle to try out ourselves and with a new PhD student whose interests are in Intelligent Virtual learning Environments (a project we call I-LE).

Keywords:

2 Comments (+/-)

1. It can be strange - though often salutary - to attend an introduction to a subject/space where you are already very knowledgeable. Your professional expertise brings a distinctive perspective on the pedagogical implications of SL. You have some excellent observations on Warburton on the discussion board, specifically referring to the importance of task. These could be usefully included here too and perhaps expanded on. Some of my other bloggers are asking questions about whether this environment is really appropriate for high level pedagogy; I'm sure you would also have some insights on that. I'm looking forward to seeing what you have to say about identity in relation to this week's discussion. I've already been sidetracked by your Digital Cultures work (and lost this comment in the process) and have had to promise myself some time to have a proper look at it later.

   I wondered, as I read this entry, about your own thoughts on having experienced people on a course. This may be something you also encounter in your own work. Personally, I think it is great to have a range of experience in a classroom or virtual programme - and the MSc certainly has students with a wide range of backgrounds. But there can be tensions between the student role and the expert role - you are sensitive to that. Perhaps the blog is a useful place to explore these issues.

   I remember a colleague in a similar position taking a course, who was challenged in a piece of assessment, and said: "Why would I have to provide evidence of X? They know I'm an international expert in this area!" And my reply was, "But for the purposes of this course, you are a student - and students are expected to provide evidence of X!" It was something I had to remind myself about too, when I was tempted to go into teacher mode sometimes!

   Your own sensitivity to these issues will help you to get a lot from this experience, I'm sure. I look forward to your next batch of insights and tantalising links! I'll be doing a more formal review commentary during this week.

   Christine Sinclair on Monday, 17 October 2011, 10:50 UTC

2. Thanks Christine. I do try my best to give information and links on things I am discussing, and very much enjoy the engagement with the others on the course. There is a fantastic range of experience and skills on the MSc courses. There should be things to discuss about identity, avatars and otherwise, when online. And in my Digital Cultures course we are looking at virtual communities and what makes them so in an ethnographic study. I plan to use a very different community to the professional community I looked at for the "learner group" in ULOE11.

   Austin Tate on Monday, 17 October 2011, 12:38 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 11:54 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 21 October 2011

Reflections on Week 5.1 - Rationale for VW Issues, and Gaining Control over Learning Assets

The work on IDEL11 in virtual worlds, Second Life and on avatar and personal identity suited me in this last two weeks, as I have been using the Second Life, OpenSim and other virtual worlds platforms for some time. It was good to interact with others who have experience, and some who have never been in a virtual world before and hear their comments. This is very relevant to my research as we support totally new users in making serious use of such platforms, and we know how awkward the technology can be to use initially for such new users, who just want to get on with some exercise or collaborative meeting.

One of the IDEL11 course readings (Warburton, 2009) on the uses of Second Life for education resonated directly with our own experience, and it was useful to see some of the academic thinking behind what we come across as issues in real use. Warburton's analysis of the rich and multiple means to communicate and maintain presence and status awareness was also directly relatable to a "Cognitive Work Analysis" (CWA) which we use as a guide to our support to a distributed collaboration community we work with in the USA. I can take the readings and citations in such papers directly into our productive use of these environments.

My competitive side came out in the IDEL11 Second Life Treasure Hunt. I found the location pretty quickly... but wanted to do an "arty" image of my avatar in a "cell of life" next to the target garden... which was apparently treated as not on target by one of the tutors! Quite right too. So I snapped another rather boring image of me sat in the garden... but it preyed on my mind as I liked the original cell image. So I went back and composed another image looking through the cell to the garden beyond. All snaps are in the Holyrood Park Blog.

Similarly on the Digital Cultures course... I completed the "Digital Artifact" - an exercise I entitled "AI - Avatar Identity" last weekend... but just had to go back over it and add a short machinima... now on YouTube. Another 2 hours gone.. but enjoyably so. See http://atate.org/ai/ai/ for the artifact and YouTube video.

The first half of the first semester of the MSC in e-Learning seems to have shot by. It is taking all the hours there are available. But I am enjoying it. The IDEL11 and Digital Cultures format and exercises have suited my style of working. I like collaborating and interacting. This opportunity brings out the thwarted (but not very capable) artist in me. I always feel I have more ideas than I can translate to graphical results I feel capture what I want to communicate. The courses offers a platform to release some of this.

The number of images put into blogs and posted on my web site has been growing... and I normally have an organised structure for larger projects... so I did some reorganisation into the normal project folders we would use. This means some image URLs have altered... I think I caught all the references in the Holyrood Park blog and I hope the various discussion forums that have used them... but its possible I missed some indirect references in postings. If you come across any unserved images in my postings please let me know so I can correct then. The mapping is http://atate.org/mscel/image.jpg -> http://atate.org/mscel/img/image.jpg

But I have not just been learning on IDEL11 and Digital Cultures... on ULOE11 this week I started my "learning challenge" which is to learn to be a junior hairdresser and how to blow dry in particular. This has also been fun... and a great talking point with others... who must think I am going mad. See progress at http://atate.org/mscel/hair/

But things are mushrooming, with ethnographic studies starting in Digital Cultures, more reading than ever in ULOE11, and much to come on all the modules. I also spoke with Hamish MacLeod this week on a number of distance education and research related matters as well as touching base on my choice of modules for Semester 2.

Keywords:

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The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 23 October 2011

Reflections on Week 5.2 - Choice and Work Style

In the last week I have been discussing my choices of module for semester 2, looking forward to the MSc dissertation and addressing choices of essay topic for ULOE11, amongst other assignment

thoughts on IDEL11 and Digital Cultures. It has helped me think about my own learning style and ways in which I work effectively and ways in which I am not so effective. It comes down to this

- I love collaboration, interaction with others and constant exchanges
- I really don't like sitting still reading on my own and long writing exercises

The choice of modules in semester 2 could involve a the game-based learning module which its high interactivity, work on the research methods module with others to prepare the way for the dissertation, and a largely personal study on a topic of interest to me and that could be useful in my own research. I can see me leaning straight away towards the game-based learning module with its high levels of collaboration and teamwork. That's a no-brainer.

But I had an interesting experience in suggesting an essay topic for ULOE11. I had ots of ideas on what to do, but was struggling to find something contained enough to do in the time available. I was planning something that would give me a good grounding in educational cognitive psychological approaches that could explain what was happening in mixed-initiative scenario-based training, which is what I am often working with in my research. But initial reading indicated it was vast topic. So I suggested a more limited look at ways in which AI had been used to assist in argumentation about core educational psychology readings in the ULOE11 discussion forum and why having a disembodied "agent" to use as an example helped in such discussions. I was reasoning that I could pick up on the discussion forum threads and present them - hopefully in a coherent way. But soon after I suggested this.. I started to feel uneasy... and I know why... it seemed to be a box ticking exercise... to do the essay... I had no **reason** to do it for my interferes. It did not **fit** into the emerging themes of interest to me - into the **story**. I have made another suggestion for the ULOE11 essay that I believe fits, and could be sufficiently scoped to be something I can get a good outcome on.

Keywords:

1 Comments (+/-)

1. There are all sorts of tensions for students coming out in this reflective piece - e.g. between being strategic and doing what you think is worthwhile or intrinsically interesting. Then there is tailoring a task to the constraints of e.g. word counts, time available, assessment criteria. It seems that you're finding a good way through all this.

   There are some associated implications for teaching: we really need to make sure that students *can* find good ways through this. Can we simultaneously accommodate the preferences of the collaborative interactive student and the one who likes sitting still reading and writing? Should these preferences be accommodated within a single module (for example through choice of assessment), across the course (through a range of distinctive modules), or across institutions (through being associated with a particular approach to course design)? Should we accept that some students are entirely strategic and have no intrinsic interest in their course - they'll *want* the box ticking. Or is this counter productive for everyone?

   I suppose I'm happy with accommodating some preferences, such as reading vs action - but less happy about others, such as learning vs commodity. Yet students do still need to be strategic to a certain extent. (I know I did - and sometimes wasn't strategic enough.)

   I like your idea of "the story" and what fits into it: every student will have their own story.

   Christine Sinclair on Monday, 24 October 2011, 15:07 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 11:55 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 21 October 2011

Reflection on Week 6.1 - In the Long Run

This week I have begun to look at issues of sustainability... for the assets I am creating, for the pace of study for myself, and for the interaction between tutors and students in distance education. I am exploring personal learning spaces, and have been reorganising the, now quite large, collection of assets and materials I am bringing together for the MSc studies. Much of this material will be useful in the long run.

Personal Learning Space

The effort in creating the materials, postings and image assets will outlive the period of study of the MSc. So, the opportunity for the IDEL11 week 6 topic to create a long term personal learning and asset space, as is now being suggested for life long e-Portfolio systems, spurred me to tidy up the web areas I have been using and bring them together. The result is a start made on a new site at http://atate.org/space/ which will give me the opportunity to make sure it can outlive availability of course blogs and systems within the University. Some thing I was already ding with my "Life Wall".

All URLs on the site and web pages are relative so the whole site can easily be archived to CD/DVD media or moved to any other hosting platform. This has been my work style since the web started and had let us outlive a number of changes of underlying web delivery technology. I decided also to adopt a new more flexible and easier to render CSS style sheet for the start of this... one that may be useful in future asset rich projects of this kind.

24/7 Tutors and Students

I have remarked to more than one tutor in the last week or two that I think the speed at which they can respond to on-line discussions and queries, even on evenings and weekends, could lead to an expectation on availability which is not sustainable. Its fine when people are enthusiastic and the technology or topic is novel. But the time taken and hours worked is not something the University of or its staff could maintain if more were involved in distance education. The immediacy of social media, the presence indication in many technologies and other aspects make the management of such interaction tricky.

Some of the course design and timetabling encourages this mode of thinking on the part of students and tutors. An example is the IDEL virtual worlds treasure hunt. There was a deadline for entries on Sunday and voting by Sunday midnight! That hardly encourages people to take a break. They need to see the entries and vote and are therefore forced back to their computers late on a Sunday evening. Its not an issue for us as individuals, especially where we have regular computer usage and good communications, but it can encourage a way of thinking and working that did not ought to be sustained for all year, or for tutors, for many years. I would make some simple changes to change the mind set a little... I would set the entries deadline to Sunday evening for those that like to think of Sunday as end of week and make voting be by end of Monday so those who do not work weekends are addressed.

Having said that I got a joint Second Prize in the treasure hunt! Were there more than 3 entries :-)

Keywords:

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The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 27 October 2011

Reflections on Week 6.2 - The Excitement of New Challenges and Boring Texts

I know that tackling specific projects, especially if they involve collaboration with others, is my preferred style of work and gives me the most motivation. Since my school days projects in my subjects were always the things I enjoyed and are what I remember most about my school days. A study of future transport in cities, a resource gathering and post board display of the products of the industries of the West Riding of Yorkshire, stroboscopic photography of gymnasts, etc.

So I had great fun and put a lot of energy and effort into the ULOE11 Learning Challenge... in which I chose the task of learning an element of the skills of a Junior hairdresser with the support of an expert trainer, Karen Temple, at the salon I normally go to for my haircut.. I probably put in way more than is needed specifically for the course... but I reasoned that that surely was not the only outcome I am seeking by involvement in the MSc. I learned a lot. The more I went into it, the more interesting it became. The specialised tools, brushes and combs were fascinating. I had access to the training manual and even the on-line e-Teaching portal used to support professional qualifications at the QCF or SVQ training level 2. Its also been a fun, and amusing to them, challenge to speak with colleagues, family and friends about. The results are at http://atate.org/mscel/hair/

Solid Blocks of Badly Laid Out Dense Text

But the extreme opposite is the volume of recommended readings on all the MSc courses I am taking to date (IDEL11, ULOE11, EDC11) which are almost all old fashioned academic journal type papers, often really badly laid out 19th Century looking texts where the clearly commercial publishers really make it clear they cannot be bothered. Pages are dense and difficult to scan. Fonts and line spacing make the papers difficult to read. Section titles are squeezed in, references are ludicrously over voluminous to let the authors show off. Summaries are not in an easily scanned and memorised form. I contrast that to something like IEEE Intelligent Systems with its modern type faces and layout, good design, serious editorial assistance, information boxes are used so that the flow of main paper is not broken by side issues, and deliberately limited (i.e. must be worth reading further) references.

IEEE Intelligent Systems is one of the top cited journals in the field of AI, focusing on applied research, and communicating to a general computer sciences readership. It exceeds the quality rating of old fashioned journals such as the long running Elsevier published "Artificial Intelligence Journal" which looks the same now as it did 30 years ago.

Examples of a couple of my own papers in IEEE Intelligent Systems (to eyeball as an indication of style and layout only) are at:

Tate, A., Chen-Burger, Y-H., Dalton, J., Potter, S., Richardson, D., Stader, J., Wickler, G., Bankier, I., Walton, C. and Williams, P.G. (2010) I-Room: A Virtual Space for Intelligent Interaction, IEEE Intelligent Systems, Vol. 25, No. 4, pp 62-71, July-August 2010, IEEE Computer Society.

http://www.aiai.ed.ac.uk/project/ix/documents/2010/2010-ieee-is-tate-iroom-as-published.pdf

Tate, A. (2006) The Helpful Environment: Geographically Dispersed Intelligent Agents That Collaborate, Special Issue on "The Future of AI", IEEE Intelligent Systems, May-June 2006, Vol. 27, No. 3, pp 57-61. IEEE Computer Society.

http://www.aiai.ed.ac.uk/project/ix/documents/2006/2006-ieee-is-tate-helpful-env-as-published.pdf

I raised this to start a discussion in the IDEL11 and ULOE11 WebCT discussion forums. What surprises me is that in an area where modern educational technology and advanced graphics are used, that so few of the very many recommended readings use modern presentation approaches.

Keywords:

4 Comments (+/-)

1. And you've started a very interesting discussion in IDEL - with some differing opinions emerging that I'm finding intriguing. I certainly agree with you about layout; we should have moved on. I can't help feeling that the REF is partly to blame ... (just edited a personal rant here – this is your blog!) I do like IEEE layouts and there is no reason why the other journals can't be like this. I ignored your "eyeball" instruction and read the first paper which is of interest to something I'm writing myself. I daren't look at the second as I've told myself it's time to stop reading and get on with it!

   There is a problem for educators when the seminal readings are in such old containers (or new pdf versions of old containers). Your thinking on this is prompting me to wonder what ways round this there might be until our containers evolve. I can think of a few - and there are perhaps more in this programme than in many (it was through the MSc that I encountered TED talks, though I'd probably have come to them eventually). New approaches might need to be "transitional objects" as Glynis Cousin discusses, and as your own I-Room paper also articulates nicely. Ultimately, we shall no doubt have very different containers - including perhaps a range of options. While it's helpful to see depictions of Plato's allegory of the cave in Youtube, I do also like to return to the original text, though not the original Greek! But I might direct a young student to Youtube as a starting point or give them several options. I transposed Plato's *Symposium* (well, a parody of it) to WebCT for my assignment for IDEL five years ago - and this had the effect of making me engage with the text much more deeply than I had ever done as a philosophy student!

   It's Friday afternoon - I'm getting too easily sidetracked! I think what's behind this is that I'd love to hear more of your views on dealing with difficult texts from an educational perspective as well as an aesthetic one. I'm answering it myself by saying "Austin wants them reduced to just the best" and "he'd prefer more projects". I'm probably sympathetic with both of these views, but still think that there are additional implications for universities that are still predominantly sites of text-based practice.

   Christine Sinclair on Friday, 28 October 2011, 15:51 UTC

2. Longer readings are fine when they are interesting :-) But the IDEL11 list of for the current block has 13 readings in it. I would say even for 2 weeks that 2 would suffice (if well chosen) and secondary readings should be reduced to only those necessary. It becomes a marathon otherwise.

   Austin Tate on Friday, 28 October 2011, 16:11 UTC

3. Yes, I don't think Hamish would enjoy my usual graphics rich, bullet style presentations on for example the ULOE11 Learning Challenge. To me the web site at http://atate.org/mscel/hair/ is all I would want to submit. But I am accommodating what I assume is a preference for old style essays. So, I ended up writing a 1,000 word block of solid text to make sure I was not marked down just because of that. I would never give that text to anyone if I wanted to summarise my achievement as a junior hairdresser though :-)

Austin Tate on Friday, 28 October 2011, 16:18 UTC

4. I am struggling with adding in the comments and editing them. And I keep deleting the wrong one as the delete tag is BELOW an entry not above it. It varies on all the platforms we use of course. So, sorry if you get a stream of e-mails saying comments are added which are no longer here now. I am trying to leave the ones in with spelling corrected!

   Ian Ritchie gave a great TED talk...

   http://www.ted.com/talks/ian_ritchie_the_day_i_turned_down_tim_berners_lee.html

Austin Tate on Friday, 28 October 2011, 16:26 UTC

Imported at: 05/12/2011 09:31 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 04 November 2011

Reflections on Week 7 - PLEs Please Me

The discussion and readings on institution centric VLEs and personally owned and controlled PLEs, and all things in between, has been useful to draw out some of the argumentation behind the gut feeling I have for personal curation of one's own personal information, data, resources, etc.

Please Me - Personal Means Ownership

It was a natural thing for me to set up a "Personal Learning Environment" in the form of web area and entry web page that brings together a lot of the scattered entry points, summary links pages and shortcuts I have to reach web sites, blogs, discussion forums, WallWisher walls, VLEs, etc for the MSc in e-Learning courses, as well as pointers to my own assignment contributions. Although I created this as part of exploring VLEs vs. PLEs for the IDEL11 course, it has quickly turned into my single point of entry at work, at home and on mobile devices for access to my educational resources and work areas for the MSc. I have refined the style sheets I used to give a simple flexible width style that gives a maximum view of the core content and works well on a range of browsers and devices with large and small (e.g. mobile device) screens. This work space is at http://atate.org/space/.

Freedom to Peek

Since I cannot resist looking ahead, I also have the EDC11 "Post-Human" WallWisher board embedded on my PLE page at present. This is a good example of how a PLE can reflect current focus for an individual learner. A more controlled VLE approach would definitely not have focused something for the following week on its front page.

Moodle as the VLE

In discussion with Jen Ross we agreed that I could utilise Moodle rather than use the personal WebCT scratchpad course creation area we all have for IDEL11. Moodle may be chosen by the University to support distance education, so it is useful to have a better look at it. I set up the Moodle site at http://virtual2.aiai.ed.ac.uk/moodle/ such that Jen Ross, and others on IDEL11 by invitation, could join in as course creators or students. So I was able to do some work on this and blog and comment in the IDEL11 discussion forum about our experience with Moodle and the contrast of that to a PLE, and how the two could work together.

In this IDEL11 block, Moodle was therefore my example of the VLE approach. It let me engage with others on the course in the discussion forum, where it turns out a number of classmates have significant experince of Moodle already. I needed to understand something about Moodle course setup and admin. I am especially interested in quizzes and questionnaires use in Moodle and in the Virtual World classrooms linked to it. I did several Holyrood Park blog entries on the experience of using Moodle and the SLoodle module to connect to a virtual worlds classroom. They also described some of my fighting with the layers of administration settings to get simple things working like student permissions and roles, and to test notifications of course participation messaging. It let me give timely feedback of a number of issues to the SLoodle developers who are

near to moving their code for SLoodle for Moodle 2.x from alpha test to beta test level.

I did in fact set up a WebCT course too and put in a few sample resources, and look over the course creation tools, just so I had dipped into that specific platform as well. this could be relevant longer term as the University is about to update WebCT to its "Learn 9" successor for on campus course support.

And Beyond - On Another Planet

I like to plan well ahead, so I have looked across all three MSc courses I am doing this semester, and have started note making and resource building for all the final assessments, and indeed beyond that to the main MSc dissertation. I had some discussions with Hamish MacLeod on a number of these options... and he "helpfully" gave my dozens of new papers and relevant references :-)

I have begun hinting about some experimentation with a concept I am developing for work on "Another Planet". The involve some exploration of an alternative to a linear text essay style by creating a non-linear "Neo-Grammar" that uses a visual and typographical style with hyperlinks to present "Connectors". Nothing concrete yet, but ideas being formed.

Keywords:

1 Comments (+/-)

1. The high-level discussions about VLEs and PLEs on the IDEL board have been very stimulating and provide a good background to your work with Moodle, which I'd like to look at too (if I get the time)! There has been much interesting technical knowledge from the cohort, but also some valuable conceptual ideas such as your own about "personal means ownership". The pedagogical implications of this are likely to be of increasing importance; in fact, I have been surprised to see how much is going on in (some) schools. Looking in on the discussion, I have grown more conscious of the significance of Sian's analysis of smooth and striated spaces and how it has become a useful shorthand to draw attention to the everchanging digital landscapes. "Another planet" (a concept of interest to me) sounds as though you may even be invoking another dimension! (If you will talk to Hamish, you'll inevitably end up with lots of interesting references - but I'm sure you knew that!)

   You're demonstrating here and in your PLE that you practise what you preach about ownership, and provide an excellent exemplar of the use of a web area to bring your many strands together. What you are doing is inspirational – and it also strikes me as the only way you can possibly keep on top of it all!

   Christine Sinclair on Friday, 04 November 2011, 16:01 UTC

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The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 10 November 2011

Reflectons on Week 8 - PLEs and Preparing for Final Assignments

The week has been characterised by some preparatory work for assignments on the three MSc in e-Learning courses I am on. There is a lot to pull together, many interesting areas to explore, and readings to go back over. But I like to start such projects early, do an initial burst of activity to get some material in place, and then take a long time to reflect and refine.

I had originally been considering proposing a project in the area of avatar identity, but decided it overlapped too much with a digital artifact I created for the Digital Cultures course at http://atate.org/ai/ai/ and it would be a pity just to do more of the same.

I have been highly motivated to explore the issues of institutional VLEs (WebCT, Learn 9 and Moodle) and Personal Learning Environments (PLEs) and things in between to support individuals with e-Portfolios of their work but offered by an institution or company (such as PebblePad). I have also been experimenting with Moodle as a VLE platform and talking about that on IDEL11 and beyond. The readings in this area are adding to the knowledge I have of the issues that must be confronted when trying to use VLEs and PLEs. And ways in which they can be more effectively used to support life long learning and asset creation by an individual. So on a suggestion of Jen Ross I looked into the material already blogged and put in discussion forums about this and realized that a lot is being said and that I have a good asset base of screen shots of my explorations and so on to start from to pull threads together. I have proposed that the final assessment for IDEL11 therefore will be in the area of PLEs and the issues surrounding their use.

I am travelling from tomorrow until mid next week, so I am putting in this report a little earlier than usual.

Keywords:

2 Comments (+/-)

1. I do think that this is a good theme to think about, and your expert knowledge will bring a useful dimension. For the purposes of this assignment, it will be important for it to be conceptually grounded as well as technologically sound. I'm wondering whether your reading is suggesting any theoretical perspectives to critique, adopt or adapt around PLEs? Are there any key principles emerging? I'm looking forward to seeing your thinking about this; I think it could be useful for a wider readership too.

   Your approach of getting started early and then taking time to reflect and refine is very appropriate. It provides a fertile environment for future thinking. I think your early start may have come a bit too soon for some of the other students this week, something you've picked up yourself! Because they weren't quite primed for it, the ideas have been difficult to engage with. It must have been a bit frustrating for you - perhaps worth holding off a bit until others have caught up. But it's been a tricky week all round and the results are beginning to shape up; I'm enjoying the debate.

   Happy travels - and look forward to next instalment.

   Christine Sinclair on Friday, 11 November 2011, 09:59 UTC

2. I would say I just have a mish mash of links between the readings and what we are observing in practice. I also looked at the whole discussion thread and will be seeing if themes can be drawn out of that. I am not sure yet if anything coherent will emerge in just a few weeks of study. But at least I am sensitised now to look for things as we go along.

   I got the impression many in the class were REALLY experienced in this area and already had involvement in PLEs, and even some administer VLEs and seek to support PLEs. But I am certainly not wanting to put others off by leaping ahead too far. A week or so away will slow me down anyway ;-) I printed off a few readings as PDF to try to keep on track with that so I still on top of things by end of next week when we change topics again.

   Austin Tate on Friday, 11 November 2011, 10:24 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 11:57 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 16 November 2011

Reflections on Week 9 - The Need for a BIG Table

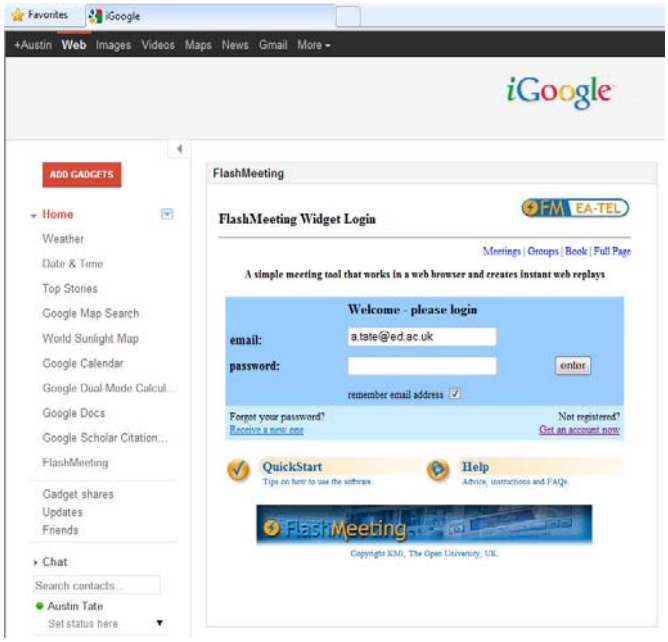
I have been organising my resources for three final course assignments for the MSc. I have outgrown the ring binders I was using to organise things, and finding I want to lay things out more. A large work surface is my answer. I like to have folders and papers in a way I can rapidly access them, look up notes I have written on them, and put them back quickly in a tidy place. A BIG table is the answer. So as I start to prepare notes and outlines of what I might cover in my essays and assignments I have cleared the decks on a whole table to help in this process.

I can see that this study or work pattern reoccurs in much of the work I do, projects I engage in, and assignments I have. Whether the table is real or metaphorical I like to lay out the resources and have them to hand. I like to feel I can get to them and the notes or markings I make on them. I like to make lists and notes and have them clearly to hand or organised into work folders for the same reason.

I had a travel period during the last week, but had chance to take with me readings for my courses. Lacking broadband and access to an environment where blogging was reasonably well supported, I found I was making more and more notes. Its always funny that a collection of "to do" notes like this always seems to take longer to process afterwards than if you just handle them as you go along. It does make it clear how much time is spent on individual blog entries, or contributions to discussion forums. Something that is not so obvious in a normal working day... until you get home and wonder what you did all day :-)

The work on using a wiki for a class exercise in IDEL11 in the last two weeks has also been interesting. I see this as a bit like the use of Twitter earlier in the course, where we tried to use it for

a range of functions, and tried not to use the discussion forum so much. Many of us were pleased to return to a more threaded style of discussion and archived/searchable content. I feel a wiki has some specific uses for community contributed and edited material, but is not suitable for all the functions we are trying to use it for in this exercise. But its useful experience.



I followed up on some suggestions by Jen Ross on learning environments research that had generated widgets that could be pulled into PLEs such as an iGoogle framework, or any web site/page that allowed for embedded frames and widgets. One such site was the Responsive Open Learning Environments (ROLE) at http://www.role-project.eu/. I followed an OU course that introduced ROLE and how to use widgets in a PLE. Following the course practical, I added the "FlashMeeting (FM)" video conference support widget from the ROLE project widget store at http://www.role-widgetstore.eu/ which turned out to be a web browser based conference tool I had used before. I still had the Open University login from the work with them on the Advanced Knowledge Technologies (AKT) and CoAKTinG projects. My recordings of the meetings held then were still in place.

I started to check through Blog entries with a view to ensuring that I had appropriate coverage of my work on PLEs and VLEs for the presentation due in three weeks or so. I found the Search function on the blog is rather poor at finding entries in the blog postings. It seems only to search categories and tags used to label posts, and not look at the full text of the postings, or even the titles. I initially could not find a posting on "PebblePad" for example, which was there when I scanned all my blog posts... which is a poor way to have to find things. I have realised that some of the entries I would like in my presentation are only in the IDEL11 WebCT discussion Forum. So am bringing these and the related screen shots over to the Blog. The separation of all this content into many walled gardens is not really very good. A personal learning environment approach that builds all content in self managed areas, and then lets you combine and use these in mashups as you wish would be better approach.

I have experimented with aggregating all my blogging on HolyRood Park (IDEL11) and the EDEDC WordPress blogs into the Moodle Blog on our experimental site, as that allows such external blog feeds to be aggregated. I have also started to archive the complete set of blog entries at each month end on Holyrood Park and EDC11 Wordpress into my personal learning environment at http://atate.org/space/ as a preservation mechanism.

Keywords:

3 Comments (+/-)

1. Your recognition of your need for a "big table" seems to sit well with your interests for PLEs – and I also wondered whether it relates to your observation in another blog post about maps, and how you can see three dimensions from looking at a map. I am not surprised at your frustration with the "imposed" spaces for their inability to handle data in the way you would like. It does bring home a point about the medium affecting the content that has strong implications for pedagogy in e-learning. I share your frustration at times; if you want to do something but the technology won't "let" you or demands that you find a compromise, there is a sense that it is dictating things. Yet in the process of working through some of these problems, your own assumptions and reasons for doing things in a particular way can become exposed.

   I tried experimenting with the blog to see how the the selection for presentation worked, and then realised I could not emulate your problem because I do not have the level of complexity in

my blog entries that you do. And nor do most other students, though i don't see that as a reason for discouraging complexity! I was disappointed that it didn't take the keywords over into the blog, but I suppose they would be easy enough to reinstate. One thing that revisiting inevitably does, though, is to draw attention to how you have done something and why – and then you start seeing connections (and I can see this happening in your blog).

I was going to conclude by wondering what the PLE means to you, perhaps in terms of suggesting some metaphor, theory or conceptual framework. But then I decided I should leave that to you!

Christine Sinclair on Thursday, 17 November 2011, 14:47 UTC

2. Yes... these things are I am sure very related. I can "see" a whole structure for the presentation I want to do.. and already have an idea of the sections. But I have now realised I cannot use the presentation HP creation/edit tool at all to do this.

   In week 1 of the IDEL11 course I started the final presentation... put in a couple of sections, a text note header on each, and started to populate them. Then when I came to week two to add in the blog entries for that week and revise where I wanted to put them,, I realised how much work would be involved in shifting up parts, or adding a text section introduction to each element. I just deleted the whole lot out as that sort of incremental build style is not what the tool supports.

   I will have to plan it all out on paper BEFORE I start. List every blog entry I want to bring in (and those are not even all available together) and get the order right first time. That's REALLY poor... and not what a tool should encourage. I am used to some tools which let you reorder entire sections or move individual elements really quickly as in the Drupal "books".

   I think many of the educational tools are designed for tiny amounts of content and unsuited to even a single course like IDEL11 let along an entire degree... or more so an entire life's learning experience and work material. People are simply thinking FAR FAR too small scale. PebblePad is an extreme (bad) case, on which I will try to draw out some reasons when I reflect on what is good and bad about VLE and PLE approaches in my IDEL11 assignment essay. My PLE area already has dozens of folders, and almost a thousand images, screenshots, etc. And we are barely 8 weeks into a one year course. Tools need to assume a lifetime of material, and very many attempts to restructure, share, copy, modify, retag, and the use of multiple and concurrent organisational methods over the

Austin Tate on Thursday, 17 November 2011, 15:19 UTC

3. I see that the "Big Space" idea seems to run through a number of my postings... and things I have picked up in the readings. See for example this blog post entitled "Why Large Shared Spaces are Important for Collaboration" from 21st October 2011 relating to comments made by Don Norman (1993):

   http://holyroodpark.net/atate/weblog/6474.html

   Norman (1993) Things that make us smart : defending human attributes in the age of the machine . Reading, Mass., Addison-Wesley Pub. Co. Chapter 6; Distributed Cognition (139 – 154).

Austin Tate on Saturday, 19 November 2011, 10:58 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 11:57 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 25 November 2011

Reflections on Week 10 - Presence and Voice

Indications of Presence in Virtual Worlds

The theme of the readings and Second Life sessions this week was to explore the notion of presence, and mechanism for achieve a sense of community and proper interchange leading to menaingful learning in in distance educational contexts. I have liked the earlier IDEL11 readings from Warburton (2009) which provides a table with a rich variety of sync and async communications and presence indication methods, as well as listing some of the issues for usability of virtual worlds like Second Life for education and collaboration.

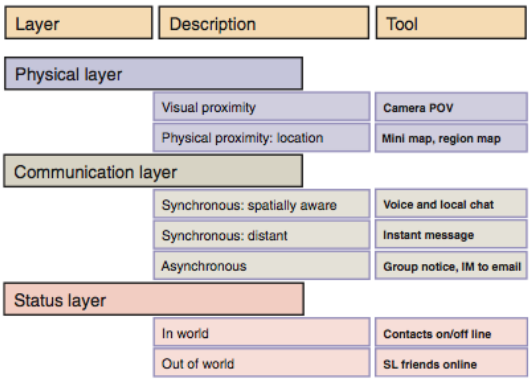

Figure 1: Presence layers in Second Life (SL). *Presence, according to Yee et al (2007), measures how real one believes a mediated environment is, in terms of non-verbal behaviours (Garau, Slater, Bee & Sasse, 2001), physiological responses (Slater, Usoh & Steed, 1994) and other measures. In the diagram, three separate presence layers are identified for SL. The physical presence layer is composed of a visual element, where avatars can see each other through the default camera point of view (POV)—the main window on the 3-D setting—and a geographic element, where the location of other avatars in-world can be tracked using the in-world 2-D maps. Physical proximity also allows avatars in-world to see physical gestures, poses and animations. The communication layer offers several channels for interaction from synchronous voice and instant messaging (IM) to asynchronous mechanisms, such as an in-world group notification system and the connection of IM to an email account. The status layer provides minimal information about in-world presence indicating when avatars are logged into SL*

Darabi et al. (2010) started off by commenting that some types of online learning have been considered deficient in providing the social interaction needed for the construction and development of knowledge. They described experiments to examine various modes of interaction using discussion forums and the like. I was surprised at the basis for these arguments, as I think that much "face-to-face" teaching often exclude many of the learners except perhaps in very small tutorial style classes, which are not by any means common place at all levels of education. I feel that online learning techniques with the rich set of synchronous and asynchronous communications mechanisms can be a facilitator for better communication in a class and account for individual learner styles and preferences as well. These methods might even improve on-campus course interactions if properly integrated with a course.

Voice in Second Life

This week for the first time on IDEL11 we used voice in Second Life. Everyone seemed to get set up and active very quickly, which is not often the case. Technically voice on teleconference systems is one of the biggest issues I come across in distance collaboration, whether for new or experienced users. Voice always seems very natural to me in these teleconference style meetings. I quickly forget my avatar and controlling it and concentrate on the subject and discussion topic to hand. But this could be because I have many years of experience of using a range of teleconference systems with and without video, and with people I know and new communities. Some classmates found the experience odd as it was their first use of voice associated with an avatar, and hearing voice as if from other people's sometime "fantastical" avatar identities.

Uncanny Pedagogical Experiences - Joking Apart

I have kidded on a bit with Siân Bayne in some discussions over the use of what I treated as "cute" terms like the "uncanny" and "ghostly" or "zombie" experiences. I got the idea of the uncertain and mind challenging environments she was described as a learning opportunity. But the Bayne (2008) reading did start to make more sense to me as a coherent approach to some people's experiences in virtual worlds. I think I have used teleconference, distance collaboration and other forms of multi-user environments for so long, and have had experience of MUDs and MOOs as they grew from their text beginnings, so that its a more natural experience for me... just like I would not call using the telephone uncanny because I can heard a disembodied voice from a distance. But I can certainly put myself into an avatar shape or type which I know I find unusual or that feels "wrong".

I found a very nicely constructed site in Second Life this week which allowed for just such an experience, and I blogged about it to draw it to the attention of others on the IDEL11 and EDEDC courses. See "Meta Body - Try an Out of Your Body Experience" - http://holyroodpark.net/atate/weblog/6776.html

IDEL11 Essay Focus

In the last week, I found I was struggling with the work I have done to date on the IDEL11 essay. I have a lot of observations and links to the literature... and many more items I now want to read back over having thought about things more. But I like to have a stronger outline or theme in mind when I am working on a paper like this... and I lack that focal point just now. But I think I might have a suitable hook.

I had earlier tried to describe some of the collaboration tools needed to support distributed collaboration in some communities I work with, to distill the experience we have with "Web 2.0" style tools for those communities, in a way I could input to the Distance Education Initiative (DEI) as it chooses tools for the University of Edinburgh. If I see the DEI steering group as one focus for what I am trying to relay about VLEs, PLEs and the sorts of collaboration tools needed, and why they differ between institutionally provided elements and personal asset management areas that might focus my thinking. I am trying that out.

References

Bayne, Siân (2008) "Uncanny spaces for higher education: teaching and learning in virtual worlds", ALT-J Research in Learning Technology, Vol. 16, No. 3., pp.197-205.

Darabi, A. et al. (2011) "Cognitive presence in asynchronous online learning: a comparison of four discussion strategies", Journal of Computer Assisted Learning, 27(3): 216-227.

Warbuton, S. (2009) "Second Life in higher education - Assessing the potential for and the barriers to deploying virtual worlds in learning and teaching", British Journal of Educational Technology, 40(3), 414-426.

Keywords:

2 Comments (+/-)

1. Lots of good stuff here, Austin. Warburton's table is particularly useful in relation to this week's discussion about presence. Your argument against deficiencies in interactions was well supported by your own "scaffolding" of fellow students (and tutors) in our Second Life voice discussion. You showed by example (and occasionally by explicit comment) that a mix of synchronous and asynchronous techniques provides a rich resource that is not available in the traditional classroom (though, as you say, it could be!)

   Warburton's table might arguably also be used to highlight personal preferences and capabilities. Students who have strong spatial awareness (such as yourself) will adapt quickly to the tools that provide a sense of visual and aural proximity. You possibly sought such affordances out early on. By now, these communications are second nature to you; for others, they have to be consciously activated each time, and that provides an extra layer of work. You clearly recognise this, and you are open to thinking about the implications as theorised by writers such as Siân. There has been evidence on the discussion board of direct experience in your fellow students of this sense of the uncanny.

   I was myself one of those students who found Second Life weird - unexpectedly, as I thought I would love it. The uncanniness has been welcome, though, in stimulating thinking about communication, differences, identity... lots of things. The range of responses to avatars is fascinating - for instance, your own observation about "controlling" your avatar. Avatars seem to be variously seen as puppets, extensions, masks, dolls, corpses, children - and many other metaphors. (I'm conscious of wanting to prod mine if she falls asleep, for instance!) Students have to be willing to live with the weirdness and work through it to get the benefits of that cognitive discomfort. Your experiments with avatars have been a delight and you have also provided some intriguing links. I nearly went off to have a look at the out-of-body experience (I noted it when you first posted it) but I've had to save it as a treat for when I've read all the blogs! This is the first time I've been tempted to go into SL as a treat or to play.

   Your assignment plans sound good - from your earlier entries it appears that you are making a case for adequate or indeed BIG spaces. The combination of your existing knowledge and your situated understanding of the student experience could be invaluable for the DEI. The thinking for the academic assignment could thus be useful for an input to that process, though you might end up with more than one document because of the different genres.

Christine Sinclair on Sunday, 27 November 2011, 10:53 UTC

2. Thanks for that very positive feedback Christine.

   I liked you comments about "poking" your avatar if she falls asleep. I know what you mean. a furious shake of the mouse does give them a jolt. I use an anti-idler which means Ai is always alert :-) And a smile attachment so he always looks happy. Be has a face light so she looks bright and cheery even in gloomy areas.

   You make a very interesting observation about being able to "tag" mechanisms that an individual comes to prefer related to communication methods and presence indicators. That's indeed could be useful for all sorts of reasons as you say. I don't like the type ahead indication to other users for example (as I frequently do a lot of pre-typing, cut and paste in my text chats and IMs), so I disable that in the debug settings of the viewer.

You will find the "Meta-Body" region interesting if you explore for half an hour. If you take the tour via touching the black sphere next to the lady in white playing the piano, make sure your animation overrider is turned off if you have one attached... and set the camera back a bit perhaps and just sit back and enjoy the trip. Make sure you try the various avatars in the sky area. They are all free, and elements of them will be very reusable.

For the assignment, I do have a problem that their are too many bits and pieces. It could look more like a scrapbook than an essay! I have already decided one more detailed part really cannot be in the "flow" of the story I want to tell. But I may add the notes as an appendix (to not be in the word count) as it seems to be something that I could come back to when I have more time.

Austin Tate on Sunday, 27 November 2011, 11:59 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 11:58 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 02 December 2011

Reflections on Week 11 - Work Style and Why Silence is (could be) Golden

Work Style and Tool Wrangling

My work style means I make a lot of notes on deliverables, sometimes far ahead of due dates. Sometimes, even on even multi-year projects, I have an outline of every deliverable on day 1 of the project. They are usually just section titles or deliverable due dates and formal reference numbers, etc. But once that outline is there I am much more relaxed. Its almost as if after that you just have "to fill things in" even where months or work might be required to do that. Then as I go along I write some sections completely and in depth. For other things I add bullets as I progress. I frequently add the screen shots and other imagery along the way. This is another aspects of my "Big Space" approach which I have blogged about before. Its as if the whole project was there and I can dip in, do bits out of temporal order, and refine things as we go along. I never like to feel I am up against a deadline and facing a "white page" problem. Until I have a hook or story line for open ended deliverables - like the IDEL11 essay - I feel much less comfortable.

I have noticed that my style of working is not well supported by the way that the Elgg blog for IDEL11 works.. something Christine and myself discussed earlier when some of my weekly IDEL11 reflection postings seemed to be out of order. You can make a draft entry and just publish it as private to yourself... and later after its complete publish it to a group or fully publicly. But when finally posted beyond yourself it retain its very first date and time. That can be far removed from when you meant it to appear in a temporally ordered blog, and causes confusion. The RSS feeds of the event also show up at the earlier date meaning they are missed by all readers. It took me a while to even realise they were present, just far back in an event stream timeline. Wordpress blogs as used on Digital Cultures works much better in this respect as you can create and manage drafts as you refine them, including all their embedded media. And then when ready publish them to the intended audience. It's that date of publish which gets attached to the post and is used in RSS feeds.

Deep Immersion, Eureka Moments, and "Coming Together" Experiences

In the readings in the last few weeks, I liked the description in Levy (2009, page 244) about the feelings that Barbara McClintock had when studying corn... and how she was deeply immersed in the world of corn when performing her molecular biological studies. She had flashes of insight in which she saw a pattern or result, even though much more work was then needed to show that it was so.

Christine in an IDEL11 Discussion Forum post mentioned a "coming together" moment Peter Higgs described are very powerful and often do need some focus and concentration on an area.

> Peter Higgs, of Higgs-Boson fame, and an emeritus professor at the University of Edinburgh described his theoretical discovery in 1964. (Extract from BBC News article, 10 September, 2008.) It happened over a weekend.

I have an example from a while ago when doing some complex 3D shape modelling and I was trying to work things by the numbers with mental 3D algebra and loads of notes..... but in a moment things sort of swam before my eyes and the shapes made sense as an imagined 3D envelope in my mind's eye was almost swirling round to see from various angles. It was quite vivid and I started to develop the actual formulae with that image still alive. But just then a family member came in to ask a question and the whole thing melted away. It took me ages to do the task after that and I never got the vision back.

Silence is (or could be) Golden

I am thinking of ways to get some quiet time to begin serious work on my IDEL11 Essay... and I am thinking of dropping out of watching my twitter time line for a period. The constant interruptions of immediate status updates and the lure of irresistible and interesting looking pointers to other material are very time consuming and distracting when really trying to focus, read and extract meaningful insights.

I notice that I was tetchy on the morning when the IDEL11 Adobe Connect session was on. I was annoyed with myself for failing to do any of a planned set of readings on VLEs and PLEs to add to the themes in my IDEL11 essay in the previous day or two, even though that had been my plan. Constrant interruptions and hard work to set up a new portal for the OpenVCE group on the APAN network (see http://openvce.net/apan) had meant I failed to get on with any planned task in that period. So another 2 or 3 hours disrupted felt bad... but I realised it was just that I knew I was not achieving my own targets for reading and seeking essay inputs.

One of this week's readings by Charlie Brooker in the Guardian on the demands and "force feed" aspects of new instant messaging techniques made me smile (or groan) as I know this feeling all too well.

Unfortunately, this coincides with a really serious virus/trojan infection on my main desktop computer... which occurred on Friday after a visit to an education blog which had a guest post that must have had malware in it and clearly infected my machine. It was a very deeply installed and persistent boot sector trojan which made a real mess. I am still not back in good shape yet.

References

Brooker, C. (2010). Google Instant is Trying to Kill Me. The Guardian, 13 September 2010.

Levy, D. (2007). No time to think: Reflections on information technology and contemplative scholarship.

Keywords:

2 Comments (+/-)

1. Interesting sequencing here as bits come together - illustrating your point about the frustrating (though sometimes useful) ways some technologies will sequence and date-stamp what you are doing. Your reflections are making me think about the care I need to take in recognising what it is I am "marking" – it's a combination of a final product and a process, though with more emphasis perhaps on the former than there was during my IDEL student days.

   You were entitled to feel tetchy in the Adobe Connect session (though it didn't particularly come across that way). There were some fundamental problems, mainly caused by my inadequate preparation for participation (based on a number of very wrong assumptions, especially the one where I thought I *had* prepared!) My apologies for that; it's not the way I prefer to make points about teaching and learning! You made some astute observations about the time spent getting ready for and participating in such an event, including the opportunity costs of getting on with some necessary reading. I have often felt this way during synchronous events such as lectures and meetings; I look forward to getting back to the asynchronous "sanctuary" of reading and writing. For others, though, the immediacy of the synchronous is more important. Our aim in this course is to look at such spaces critically and consider how they could be used - I have been interested to see some students using Adobe Connect for "learning events" in the Course Design module.

   So lots in this entry about the uses of time and what gets in the way - including viruses (sounds a particularly nasty one) - and getting back the precious train of thought after interruptions. Your hooks and storylines in your big spaces seem to work well to keep you on top of it all, and then when you have to work within an incompatible environment (such as this one) that adds to the frustration. I do recognise some of these frustrations as a potential grain of sand in the oyster - if everything works too smoothly, then those flashes or slower shapings perhaps don't get the opportunity to emerge.

   Christine Sinclair on Friday, 02 December 2011, 13:16 UTC

2. The tetchy feeling was entirely due to frustration at myself for not knuckling down to the reading in spite of concurrent activities... and my usual desire to get hooks and story line set up well in advanced of actual deadlines.

   Austin Tate on Friday, 02 December 2011, 14:14 UTC

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The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Other Observations

Other Observations

This section collects together blog posts on IDEL11 readings, observations on using educatyional technology and collaboration tools on the course, and inputs not otherwise covered in my week-by-week "reflections" postings.

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Blog post: 05 October 2011

(Lack) Of Ideas and (Insufficient) Data

Where shall we to begin to unravel the drivel in the paper by Roszak. Let's start with his use of language... humans have minds and think... with no "quotes" on the words. Computers are "data processors" which "regurgitate" from "memory" with heavy use of quotes. Their proponents are "data merchants" - you can almost hear him spit as he says it - and they promulgate a "cult of information" - my quotes. Human memory is the "invisible psychic adhesive" - give me a break.

Then we get pages on "ideas" which humans "think" about, and how those differ from what "computers" can "process" - and Rosak helpfully explains that these are generalization mechanisms based on experience of more or fewer instances. Pity he seems to not know about explanation based generalization systems in computers which have worked for many years to find and refine categories in the taxonomies in many knowledge-based systems, and then used to great effect to advance scientific knowledge in astronomy, genetics and drug discovery. These systems have been around for well over three decades, so if he was speaking about generalisation, you think he could have looked it up (suggested keywords: "computer" "AI" "generalization"). But then again perhaps (neo-)luddites cannot do proper research if it involves using computers.His poor use of the Logo Poetry generator program, which included an element to ensure some randomizing phrases and vocabulary was introduced into the generated poems, was introduced as his example to illustrate the level of computer "simulation" of human "originality". This really is such a poorly related example I could not believe it got through peer review even in a philosophy paper.

He begins to go off into the void with references to the self reflection and how the mind is such a wonderful thing because it cannot fully model itself... but can (of course) completely understand its own creations. He asserts that it is "impossible to invent a machine that will be the mind's equal". Well maybe we can try to go for "mind" rather than mind and we might succeed. He does like his "quotes".

Roszak, T., (1994) "Of Ideas and Data" from Roszak, T., The cult of information : a neo-Luddite treatise on high tech, artificial intelligence, and the true art of thinking pp.87-107, University of California Press.

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:03 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 13 October 2011

Done, but with errors on page!

Browser incompatibility with served web pages and web content has been an issue for some time since multiple browsers and platforms have become available. HTML itself was designed to allow for multiple possible renderings to allow for differences of display device, etc. But as web pages have used proprietary content (e.g. Flash) and used progressively more complex scripting (e.g. JavaScript), style sheet variants (e.g. CSS) and other platform dependant content, and as specialized versions of web pages for mobile devices have appeared, the things have recently become much worse.

We often get pages partially rendered, but see the message "Done, but with errors on page" showing in the browser status bar. This is often due to JavaScript or other underling errors... an example, taken from the Holyrood Park Blog site itself, might look like this if you open the diagnostics window...

> User Agent: Mozilla/4.0 (compatible; MSIE 8.0; Windows NT 6.0; Trident/4.0; chromeframe; SLCC1; .NET CLR 2.0.50727; Media Center PC 5.0; InfoPath.1; .NET CLR 1.1.4322; .NET CLR 3.5.30729; .NET CLR 3.0.30729; .NET4.0C)
> Timestamp: Mon, 10 Oct 2011 19:18:06 UTC
>
> Message: Object expected

Line: 2 Char: 1 Code: 0
URI: http://edc11.education.ed.ac.uk/.../northern-web-coders/js/dropmenu.js

A serious problem is that pages are getting richer in content, but page developers are failing to test in multiple browsers, consider different bandwidth devices, different size screen failing to provide fall back styles where they sue advanced facilities, etc.

White Screen of Death by waiting...

Another issue is that page developers, and most content management systems and social network style web pages are laid out in ways that mean the page does not render until most of the content has been downloaded to the browser. Where the page contains many thumbnails, images, and other large volume content this can mean the user sees a blank screen for a long time on slower links before the whole page is shown. Progressive rendering of downloaded content is not possible if the style typical of social network web pages is adopted. The developers of those web pages and styles often fail to set image and table/element pre-size indicators which means the content has to be loaded before the browser can decide on the layout position.

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:04 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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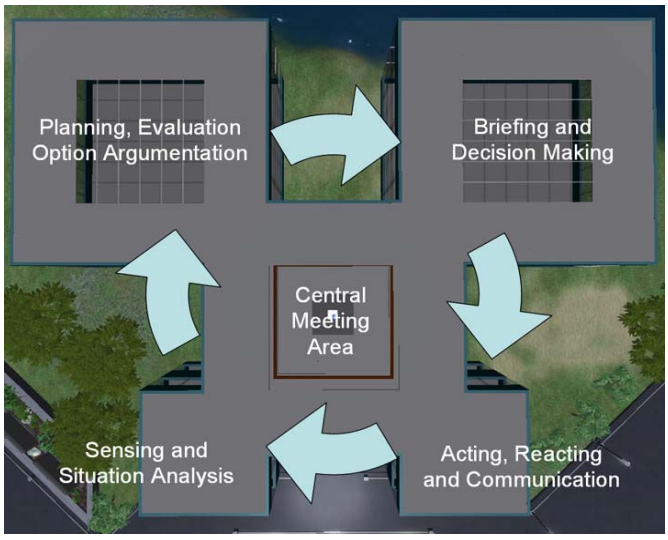
Blog post: 21 October 2011

Why Large Shared Spaces are Important for Collaboration

I am reading some papers by Don Norman, and one on "Distributed Cognition" (Norman, 1993) makes some very nice points about the value of large situation rooms and operations centres for providing a joint view of the current situation and actions being taken in complex environments such as power station control rooms and emergency response centres. I have been in such centres for real and training situations, for natural disaster response in Tokyo, for a nuclear power station in the UK and for search and rescue coordination in the UK and the USA. They are all set up to allow for people to gather round or have a view of screens and see information in a shared environment.. the operators and responders are not all looking at their own screen separately... though of course they do that to use specialised tools, information and communications which they bring to the shared space.

In our work we have sought to replicate this sort of shared situation space, as a basis for human centric decision support. When we started to embody our technology in virtual worlds we wanted to replicate some of the benefits of this, and indeed provide a shared space for distributed participants, as is often the need in complex multinational emergencies. We are sometimes asked why we want to replicate rooms with walls when we are in virtual worlds, and I respond that we want the wall space for displays and distinct functional areas that everyone can remember and use.



In our I-Rooms (http://openvce.net/iroom) we have a shared central space in which participants gather and communicate, and from which viewpoint they can direct their attention to any of four functional areas set in a cyclic pattern to allow for situation assessment, option exploration, briefing and external communications. It supports the OODA Loop (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/OODA_loop) as an underlying approach and lets us place human and intelligent systems support into a meaningful whole which all the participants can involve themselves in as appropriate.

Reference: Norman (1993) Things that make us smart : defending human attributes in the age of the machine . Reading, Mass., Addison-Wesley Pub. Co. Chapter 6; Distributed Cognition (139 – 154).

Keywords:

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Blog post: 16 November 2011

Link Ahead - Synchronous and Asynchronous Elements for Collaboration - Landow and Heywood

Landow (2006, pp 284-285) gives a very nice example of the effect of using Hypermedia alongside Peter Heywood's usual weekly topic based course on cell plant biology. He observed that students could follow links ahead into later materials, versus being over constrained by the current topics and resources to hand. This encouraged them to make links between items in the course, and look for more interesting opportunities to them as individuals for discussions and assignment topics. The wiki and hypertext elements added to the traditional weekly format course made possible a way for the class to work asynchronously, we well as to maintain class focus based on the weekly content and milestones.

I have come across this also in my use of Moodle along side the OpenVCE.net community portal (for asynchronous community support) and meeting spaces in Second Life, Adobe Connect or Skype (for synchronous meetings of the community). We wanted to have both elements of a cross course community resource area and a topic or time tabled element. We did this by having a standing OpenVCE community "course" using Moodle's "social" format, and also a "topic" or "weekly".

I would observe that in some studies we have done of communities who engage in distributed collaboration (Hansberger et al., 2010) we find that the types of functions they wish to perform together leads to a set fop requirements for both synchronous and asynchronous interactions, which can be facilitated by different tools.

Hansberger, J.T., Tate, A., Moon, B. and Cross, R., Cognitively Engineering a Virtual Collaboration Environment for Crisis Response, Proceedings of the 2010 ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Working. (CSCW 2010), Savannah, Georgia, USA, 6-10 February 2010.

Landow, George P., (2006) "Reconfiguring literary education" from Landow, George P., Hypertext 3.0: critical theory and new media in an Era of Globalization pp.278-291,302-309, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:12 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Virtual Worlds and Avatar Identity

Virtual Worlds and Avatar Identity

This section collects tiogether the various postings I made about the use of virtual worlds on the course and some IDEL11 tutorial meetings held on the Vue South regiion in Second Life. It also shows somwe of the developments that I created to explore "Avatar Identity" and "Other Worlds".

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Blog post: 22 October 2011

A Brief History of Virtual Collaboration

To add to some of the history of MUD/MOO/MUVEs given by Warburton (2009), I will add here an information panel from one of my papers in IEEE Intelligent Systems (Tate et al., 2010) as it shows the history is not rooted only in game interests.

> Tate, A., Chen-Burger, Y-H., Dalton, J., Potter, S., Richardson, D., Stader, J., Wickler, G., Bankier, I., Walton, C. and Williams, P.G. (2010) I-Room: A Virtual Space for Intelligent Interaction, IEEE Intelligent Systems, Vol. 25, No. 4, pp 62-71, July-August 2010, IEEE Computer Society.
> http://www.aiai.ed.ac.uk/project/ix/documents/2010/2010-ieee-is-tate-iroom-as-published.pdf

A Brief History of Virtual Collaboration

While strongly influenced in recent years by advances in computer game technology, the origins of virtual worlds and their social networking aspects can be traced to research into multi-user persistent spaces that began in the late 1970s and explored object sharing and chat for collaborative systems, especially in the field of artificial intelligence. Adding object oriented programming to script or control the objects in the shared space expanded the possibilities. Dating from 1990, LambdaMOO (http://lambdamoo.info/) is one well known example of this type of multiuser, object-oriented virtual space.

Work in this area has continued, with the environments now being used alongside teleconferencing, videoconferencing, and instant messaging with agent presence and status information. A good example is the Collaborative Virtual Workspace (http://cvw.sourceforge.net/), originally built by MITRE between 1994 and 1999, that used a buildings-and-rooms metaphor for persistent storage of the documents and shared assets used in collaborations. Many videoconference support systems use the idea of setting up a virtual workspace "room" to give context to a particular presentation or meeting.

The foundations of the I-Room project, within the context of the wider I-X Research Program, lie in extensions to this idea to make use of intelligent planning and collaboration aids alongside CVW. These represent just a handful of the proposals that have appeared over the last decade that describe a room for intelligent team-based interaction or a room that could itself act as a knowledge-based asset for a group. Some of these concepts were explored in the Collaborative Advanced Knowledge Technologies in the Grid (CoAKTinG) project.

References

- R.A. Bartle, "Early MUD History,"1990; http://www.mud.co.uk/richard/mudhist.htm
- S. Buckingham Shum et al., "CoAKTinG: Collaborative Advanced Knowledge Technologies in the Grid," Proc. 2nd Workshop Advanced Collaborative Environments, Advanced Knowledge Technologies (AKT), 2002; http://www.aktors.org/coakting/
- Warbuton, S. (2009). Second Life in higher education" Assessing the potential for and the barriers to deploying virtual worlds in learning and teaching. British Journal of Educational Technology, 40(3), 414-426.

I very much like the persistence aspect of Second Life/OpenSim and other virtual worlds meeting spaces/classrooms/operations centres. I don't think this is captured at all by teleconference and video teleconferencing systems on their own, and even Adobe Connect with its resources, chat room and app sharing, etc. Though some systems like Mitre's CVW did set up the rooms/buildings metaphor for that persistence of shared resources while layering video teleconferencing on top. CVW was used heavily by the US military for their distributed ops centres teleconferening. It also included IMPs.

So, to add to this note, I would specifically draw your attention to the Mitre CVW idea of IMPs (Intelligent Multimodal Participants) that could reside in CVW functional "rooms" to monitor activity, give assistance in the room, or relay information to users whose attention was elsewhere.

Reference:

Michael Krutsch (1999) "IMPs Enhance Virtual Collaboration Enmvironments", The Edge, Mitre Corporation, Intelligent Human-Computer Interface, December 1999, Volume 3 Number 4.

http://www.mitre.org/news/the_edge/december_99/fourth.html

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:16 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 10 October 2011

Avatar Identity

Its tricky to know which is the "real" avatar...

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:17 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 09 October 2011

Avatar to Avatar Chat

My two OpenSim avatars chatting away together. Part of an exercise for the Digital Cultures EDC11 Digital Artifact exercise: http://atate.org/ai/ai/res/2011-10-09-chat-log-ai-and-be.txt

At least they don't bicker like some recent chatbot to chatbot chat experiments: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WnzlbyTZsQY

Keywords:

2 Comments (+/-)

1. I enjoyed this slightly edgy discussion - and wonder which one of them would make the stronger claim for identity with you!

   Christine Sinclair on Wednesday, 12 October 2011, 10:44 UTC

2. Thats easy... Ai is the only one I have provided some teaching to on topics he has been asked about before. And, when talking to Be, he still complains that I have not informed him about my opinions on matters he was chatting about!

   Austin Tate on Wednesday, 12 October 2011, 10:49 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:18 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 17 October 2011

Avatar Indentity - me, us or them?

Avatar Identity exercise - are the avatar clones me, us or them? See http://atate.org/ai/ai/ for more...

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:18 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 11 October 2011

Exploration of EduNation Region in Second Life

This is a mixed use and mixed institution educational area, with a number of plots used by a range of Universities, coverages and academic groups. There are a number of "classrooms in the sky" on various levels.

- http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/EduNation/219/231/74 (Castle to Overlook the Region)
- http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/EduNation%20III/136/127/900 (High Dive Platform)

On arrival and initial exploration, the area is not well described or signposted. There is no obvious entry/arrival area and no note cards are offered. Looking round though it was clear there were specific institution and class areas set up for specific subjects. A veterinary studies area had sculptures of horses, and posters and displays related to horse anatomy for example. It had some nice teaching and presentation aids. There was a nice interactive "Artboard 2.1" using prims for marked lines.

To find out more about the area and its uses, a Google search on "EduNation Second Life" leads to http://heyjude.wordpress.com/2007/02/05/edunation-secondlife/ which has next to no content and no one has posted comments... it's full contents are:

The Consultants-E are proud to launch the first private island simulator in Second Life dedicated to online training seminars and conferences, and the use of Second Life in Education. EduNation is a 65,000m2 island in the Second Life virtual world with seminar, powerpoint, audio and videocast facilities. Use of the seminar facilities is free. More information at EduNation (http://www.theconsultants-e.com/edunation/edunation.asp)

That URL leads only to "Server Error - 404 - File or directory not found. The resource you are looking for might have been removed, had its name changed, or is temporarily unavailable.

This is rather typical of educational regions that are not well managed or owned by specific stake-holders. The area should be considered as one that lets people set up individual classrooms and areas and is not meant to have a cohesive design or allow for random exploration and discovery.

A good example of it in productive use by educators, and the reason I chose this region to explore, was a recent demonstration of a new version of the SLoodle module for the Moodle Victual Learning Environment. The demonstration organisers set up a new area well up in the sky and rafter landing at a simple initial meeting space, they dynamically rezzed large platforms nearby to show the facilities. and even rezzed a bridge to let the visitors walk over to that newly created facility. I attended a briefing about the new SLoodle 2 toolset on the EduNation III region of Second Life on Sunday 18-Sep-2011 by Paul Priebsch (avatar name: Fire Centaur). About 30 other educators were there. A feature of SLoodle 2 is the ability to set up "scenes" an rapidly rezz them in and around a classroom for a lesson, and then tidy them away so the ability can be re-used. This was demonstrated live on the EduNation regions. The SLoodle quiz chair can be set up to give rewards to students, or "penalise" them for failure... including dumping them in a shark filled pool with realistic screams!

A blog report of that demonstration is at http://holyroodpark.net/atate/weblog/6149.html. Full size versions of some images of the demo meeting are gathered at http://openvce.net/sloodle

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:19 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 11 October 2011

IDEL11 Second Life Introductory Tutorial

MSc in e-Learning IDEL11 Module - Virtual Worlds in Education section... tutorial for new avatars and to get used to the facilities on Virtual University of Edinburgh (Vue) given by Frank Lassard and Pancha Enzyme...

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:19 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 12 October 2011

IDEL11 Tutorial on Warburton 2009

Attended tutorial on Holyrood Park in "The Grove" campfire tutorial space on Vue facilities in Second Life. This is Ai arriving from above looking down over the Vue regions, and then in the meeting.

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:20 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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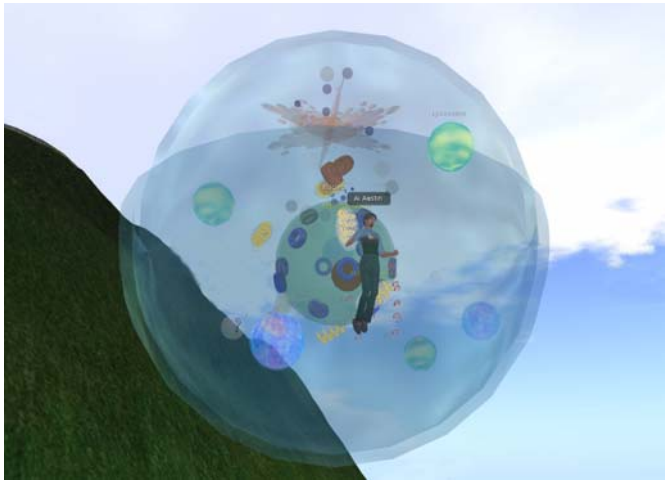
Blog post: 18 October 2011

On the Treasure Hunt... Roots of Life...



Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:20 UTC
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Blog post: 20 October 2011

On the Treasure Hunt... Roots of Life... Take 2

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:21 UTC
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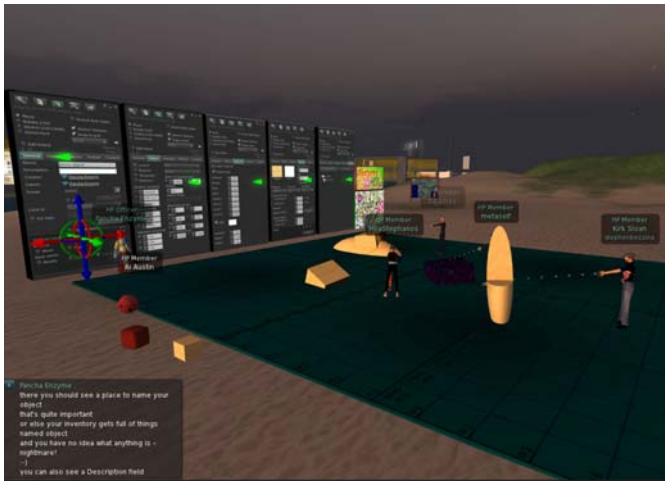
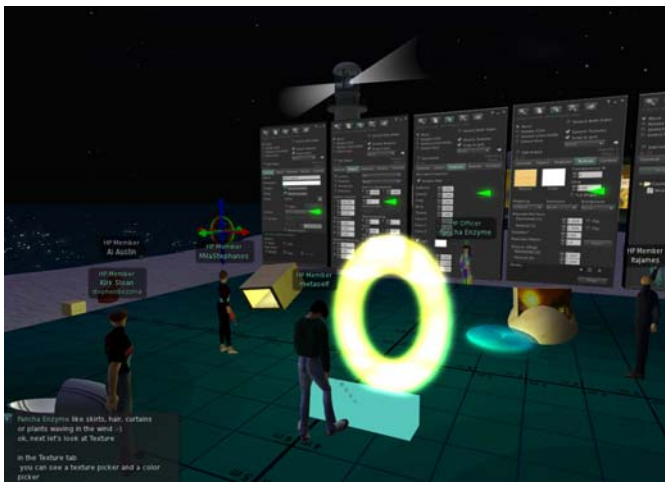
Blog post: 17 October 2011

Second Life Building Tutorial





Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:22 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 19 October 2011

Austin, Ai and the Personal Satellite Assistant

Reading Boellstorff (2008) and his stories of virtual world encounters.... I have some related observations. This may get a bit deep and multi-layered.. I like layers of storytelling and meaning :-)

Some of you may (or may not) have noticed that my avatar changed appearance during the Second Life building tutorial this week. My normal bearded avatar and flight suit outfit (there is a whole history behind that too) .. changed to be a little red round ball. Why?

When "I" (Austin) am "he" (Ai) he normally shows attention and is responsive to what is happening around. I do not like "busy" and "afk" indicators and prefer to log out - or go elsewhere in world. I am not happy to leave my avatar unattended and feel it would be rude to do so... though I have no problem with others adopting that style of use of virtual worlds.

For a few years I used some text only and mobile device or low bandwidth non-graphical clients like Radegast and iPad's Pocket Metaverse. I was always unhappy that I had no idea what my avatar would look like, how it would be positioned, that it might face wrongly to those I interacted with, and it was difficult to make the avatar appear such that it was clear I was on a text chat/IM only client.

So I put some effort into designing an avatar that reflected this state of affairs. This was a Personal Satellite Assistant (PSA)... a real device NASA is working on for the Space Station that uses AI

technology. It acts as an assistant to relay messages, give instructions and help, and record via camera things going on in experiments in the Space Station. It hovers near astronauts to help them, or can be sent to perform tasks. It has a screen on its front to show astronauts images, video, messages, etc. I have explicit permission from NASA Ames Research Lab to use the image of the skin of this device in my work and in virtual worlds .

I have used a sphere with this PSA skin for a number of AI driven and autonomous devices in Second Life for several years. Enter any I-Room (http://openvce.net/iroom) and there will usually be one at the entrance to act as a greeter or sensor sending back visitor and status information to our intelligent system over the web.

So I created the Ai PSA Avatar with the PSA shape, size and skin, and showed on the screen a portrait image of "Ai" to show its him that is watching as if over a video teleconference link - i.e. not immersive and "in world" fully.

Even though not on a low bandwidth or text client at the SL building tutorial, my attention was elsewhere. In fact my camera was not even in the same region as the tutorial space. I was looking at an object in a distant region that had the properties I wanted to copy to replicate a complex object I did not know how to build. But I did not feel comfortable just leaving "Ai" unattended... and did not want to fly away to get the information. I have the same issue when I am looking at web pages, or using other applications alongside the Second Life viewer. This was a case when it felt exactly right to use the Ai PSA avatar.

I see this as "Ai" looking through the "PSA" robot floating in the meeting space... "I" am behind "Ai" but its "Ai" that is disconnected from the meeting space.

Boellstorff, T. (2008). Personhood. In Coming of Age in Second Life (pp. 118-150). Oxford: Princeton University Press.

[First posted on IDEL11 Discussion Forum, 19-Oct-2011]

Keywords:

1 Comments (+/-)

1. This is very much like the "IMPs" (Intelligent Multimodal Participants) (Krutsch, 1999) in the Mitre (now open source) Collaborative Virtual Workspace (CVW), something we worked with on a DARPA project around that time.

   Krutsch, Michael (1999) "IMPs Enhance Virtual Collaboration Envirionments", Intelligent Human -Computer Interface Issue, The Edge, Vol. 3, No. 4., December 1999. http://www.mitre.org/news/the_edge/december_99/fourth.html

Austin Tate on Friday, 11 November 2011, 12:29 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:22 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 20 October 2011

Second Life - Holyrood Park Cloud Space - Discussion

Discussion on avatar identity and "personhood" using papers by Tom Boellstorff and James Paul Gee as a basis... in the Cloud Space discussion area over Holyrood Park in the Vue South region in Second Life.

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:23 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 16 November 2011

Are you on Another Planet?

I have been cooking up another project… the appeal of utopian "Other Worlds" and projecting identities into them (see Gee, 2003). The creative experience of imagineering such a world, making it plausible and "real", and inhabiting it in a social context is something I want to explore more.

http://atate.org/another-planet/

I have been initially building some images related to this on WallWisher and making some notes about a grammar of "connections", which I hope to partially explore in a Digital Cultures course assignment.

Gee, James Paul (2003) "Learning and Identity: what does it mean to be a half-elf?" from Gee, James Paul, What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy, pp 51-71, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:25 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 16 November 2011

Are You on Another Planet? - Well sort of... on a Moon Really

I have always been fascinated by fast cars, advanced planes and spacecraft and there is a thread running through my interests which I have been able to explore while creating my "Life Wall" - http://atate.org/ as part of the MSc in e-Learning Digital Cultures course - so this blog post fills in some background.

Fast Cars

Many members of my family have been involved in motorsport at a number of levels, and I got the bug early on. I had a scrambling motorbike that we used in fields adjacent to our house in Knottingley, West Yorkshire, and later developed a drag racing sprint bike that we raced at Ricall aerodrome on Drag Racing weekends with the North of Britain based British Quarter Mile Association (BQMA). I was already a rally car navigator for my older brotherSon local De Lacy Motor Club events before I could legally drive myself. I can read a map as if its a 3D model laid out before my eyes. We were taught to drive by my dad in our field and on local aerodromes, and I used my brother's (fast racing) go-kart a few times. Scary to be that close to the ground at nearly 100mph. I passed my driving test almost as soon as I was 17, joined the De Lacy Motor Club and competed in local rallies and driving test and motorcross, and I have a few trophies to show for the effort.

But my interest in fast cars and vehicles went beyond that. I loved the engineering cutaways shown in the "Eagle" comic each week, and I followed a number of UK and US Hot Rod and Drag Racing communities via magazines. I was lucky to be taken by my elder brother to see the first visit of the US Drag Racing Team to the UK, who brought over the dragsters then just touching 200mph from a standing start in a quarter mile sprint. Don Garlits, Don Prudehome, Tony Nancy and the other famous racers of the 1960s were all there when I saw a 200mph run at RAF Woodvale in Lancashire. I was an avid followers of the fascinating battle for the land speed record in the US between Art Arfons and Craig Breedlove as they went through 400mph, then 500mph and then 600mph in the space of a couple of years. My dad took us over to see Donald Campbell doing some of his trials runs on Coniston Water in the UK Lake District. I continue to follow the more recent land speed records attempts and have been a supporter of Richard Noble and Andy Green's supersonic record car in 1997 with my name being carried in certificates in the car as it did its runs at Black Rock Desert in Nevada. I now support the new Bloodhound SSC car being designed to do 1,000mph. My name will be on its tail.

Fast Planes

The early 1960s were a good time for those interested in fast planes and supersonic or hypersonic travel - with the X-15 rocket plane able to do hundreds of flights straight up into space and back on a ballistic trajectory. We are only just getting back to the time that will be reasonably feasible again with Virgin Galactic's SpaceShip Two. Though it was not something that was known about to the general population in the 1960s, it later transpired that the SR-71 Blackbird was routinely flying at Mach 3 or more for many hours on high altitude spying and scientific missions since the 1950s. I still find the SR-71 the most beautiful aircraft and take every opportunity to visit one in the museums around the world as I travel. And I take one for a spin any time I can in Flight Simulators.

Far Space

So with these interests, its not surprising I was also interested in space. I was interested in space before sputnik flew, and already had (and still have) a well thumbed copy of Patrick Moore's "Boys Book of Space", with pencil drawings of the features of the moon in the back from my pre-teen years. I lived through the early Space Race years, and have my collectors cards that went from Sputnik up to visionary deep space probes and talk of a "Grand Tour" of the solar system which I loved the idea of. It would be some years before my AI planning software was used by NASA JPL as a basis for Steve Vere's Deviser planning system that would (after its launch) model the activity of the Voyager spacecraft which actually flew this Grand Tour mission, and continues to send tweets which I receive each day of its position far beyond the Solar System edge.

I have ready to use luggage labels (issued for promotional purposes) when I registered my interest in Thomas Cook flights to the Moon!

I am a Fellow of the British Interplanetary Society which is a fantastic way to stay in touch with space related activities as an amateur. But I have also worked professionally with the European Space Agency consulting on autonomous spacecraft, and worked on projects with them on planners for the ERS-1 spacecraft and a system for assembly. integration and test of Ariane launchers. Our work at AIAI has also fed into telecommand systems for EUMETSAT metrological spacecraft and for ground station planning for the UK Skynet observation spacecraft.

One thing we have found to be a great way to stay in touch with missions has been to place our name on lists carried on CDs, chips or plaques on board exploration spacecraft. We have had our names on the Opportunity and Spirit rovers now on Mars, and our name was carried on a chip on-board the return capsule on Stardust sample return mission to Comet Temple 1. The chip should be in the Smithsonian museum in future. Our names were also on the Deep Impact comet penetrator mission. Our names and photos (and those of my virtual world avatar after an invitation from a NASA Colab group I am part of in Second Life) have flown on each of the last flights of the Space Shuttle in the last 12 months. Unfortunately, we just missed seeing one launch while in Florida after a launch scrub, but did visit and see the penultimate Space Shuttle Discovery on its pad at Cape Canaveral. But in the past we have seen two shuttle launches. And we will shortly be off to Mars again on the new "Curiosity" Mars Exploration Lab.

Forever - To infinity and Beyond

But perhaps the one I find most interesting, is that our names and a poem I wrote were carried alongside other digital artifacts on board the European Space Agency's Huygens Titan lander taken by the Cassini spacecraft to Saturn. All contributors were provided with a copy of the whole set of artifacts by ESA when the content were completed before launch. We followed that whole mission. Huygens drifted down through methane clouds gently to land in soft terrain on the shores of a liquid methane lake overlooked by the rings of Saturn through a hazy sky.

Drift down through the clouds... We're with you.
Swing slowly on the parachutes aloft...

Our names now stand by that methane sea, at a point in the solar system beyond the distance where the Sun will eventually grow in its red giant stage and consume the Earth. To infinity... and beyond...

[Blog post originally on Digital Cultures on 8-Oct-2011. Reposted on Holyrood Park IDEL11 Blog for Presentation Purposes]

Keywords:

2 Comments (+/-)

1. In IDEL, we are exploring different digital environments as a basis for thinking about conceptual frameworks and pedagogical principles. These environments are generally already familiar to you and of course your work and interests take you so much further. It's been fascinating to see in this blog the digital spaces you have entered - and the real ones that you have entered digitally. I'm also enjoying reading the history; I've been a fan of John Naughton's *A Brief History of the Future* because of the way it captures the human aspects of the development of the internet, and your accounts have some some echoes of that.

   Christine Sinclair on Tuesday, 22 November 2011, 11:33 UTC

2. I agree the early history of the Internet has all sorts of interesting social aspects... and the timing was interesting in overlappping with a number of other developments - space exploration, more liberal attitudes, questioning of old authorities and elites, etc.

   This post by me on the Digital Cultures blog and especially the link may be of interest... scroll right to the bottom of that 1972 Rolling Stone magazine story for some fascinating stories...

   http://edc11.education.ed.ac.uk/austint/2011/11/09/spacewar-virtual-worlds-circa-1972/

   Austin Tate on Tuesday, 22 November 2011, 11:56 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:25 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 18 November 2011

Meta Body - Try an Out of Your Body Experience

A very beautifully designed Second Life region is worth exploring. I suggest you arrive in the Meta_Body area first. Use this teleport link:

- http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/Porto/132/109/703

Look at the (freely available) avatars to explore your identity and see which feel strange to you, and some which might appeal. There are a few male and more female avatars available to try. Select the strangest before you embark on a tour of the lovely areas which are on the land surface, on small islands, on sky islands, and underwater. Sit for a while on some of the areas. Click on things to see what they do.

Eventually find your way to a white ice themed area with a lady playing a white piano. Try touching the black "Omega Star Dream 5" sphere for an animated tour through some of the lower elements of the region. If you cannot find this use this SLurl to get there directly:

- http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/Porto/105/91/62

[Reposted from EDEDC Digital Cultures Blog]

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:57 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 24 November 2011

IDEL11 Second Life Voice Meeting on Presence

Also see

- http://atate.org/mscel/img/2011-11-24-IDEL11-SL-Voice-2.jpg
- http://atate.org/mscel/img/2011-11-24-IDEL11-SL-Voice-3.jpg

Space Navigator device I mentioned:

- http://www.3dconnexion.com/products/spacenavigator.html

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:26 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 24 November 2011

MSc in e-Learning Virtual Graduation 24-Nov-2011

All images for the MSc in e-Learning graduates, and some overview shots are at
http://atate.org/mscel/virtual-grad/

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:27 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Explorations with VLEs and PLEs

Explorations with VLEs and PLEs

This section bring together postings relevant to exploring VLEs, PLEs and e-portfolio tools used in the University of Edinburgh and beyond.

In particular, there are a number of posting related to Moodle and the SLoodle module to allow its connection to Second Life or OpenSim. I was interesed in the open source Moodle VLE for both future University distance education support and to support the I-Room space for intelligent interaction research.

Top

Blog post: 15 September 2011

Moodle / SLoodle Experiments - Issue 1

A couple of years back we rigged up a Moodle VLE server (http://moodle.org) and set up some "courses" to support collaborative meetings especially to allow for file resource interchange and sharing, and for questionnaire's and feedback during meetings. We connected the web site to a meeting space in Second Life (http://secdondlife.com) using the Sloodle set (http://sloodle.org). The server still runs at http://openvce.net/moodle

I am interested again in Moodle 2 and recent work on a much richer in world linkup using the SLoodle kit which can now support rich shared media in Second Life, and important for the future, the open source OpenSimulator (http://opensimulator.org). We want to tie the questionnaire and shared resource handling more closely to intelligent systems for meeting room support - in our I-Room work (http://openvce.net/iroom).

I plan to use this blog to document progress, trials and tribulations as we go along in the hope others might find it useful.

The first thing was how messy all the information was on what the most recent versions of SLoodle were available and for which versions of Moodle. As a lot of people still use Moodle 1.9.x rather than the more recent Moodle 2.x. As usual a short e-mail to one of the core users in such a helpful community got me on the right path. But even then download links were stale, out of date copies had been archived and their link blogged rather than the original material, etc. So job number 1 was to start a web page with the up to date information as I found it... trying to show original URLs but also providing convenient URLs (in some cases to locally stored resources). That page is at http://openvce.net/sloodle and will evolve as things change or corrections are needed.

So to our main openvce.net web and database servers... the requirements for Moodle 2.1 means that a later version of PHP is needed than our computing support team are happy to have running due to security. This will be fixed, but not in an immediate time frame. So we use our usual backup experimental arrangement using one of the AIAI servers on which we have XAMPP to provide a convenient and simply managed Apache web server, MySQL database server, PHP and Perl scripting.

I am an optimist, so I unpack Moodle 2.x install it in the right place in the web server and just start the install script in a web browser. Ah well. Not so fast Austin. It complains the PHP version on XAMPP is JUST one sub release too old. Pity.

A close down of all services, an uninstall of the services, a reboot, a big safe backup of the web area, data base and some local files on the experimental machine, archive and an hour later I can try again. I put on the new version of XAMPP, reinstate the data base and web areas, put back the new Moodle area, etc. And kick it all back into life. A BIG PHP not running error in the browser stops me short. Half an hour of fiddling, no joy. Something in XAMPP upgrade has gone wrong.

Luckily I can roll back. ALWAYS CREATE A BACKUP BEFORE YOUR UPGRADE. Half an hour later and I am back to where I started with a slightly too old XAMPP and no Moodle 2.x. To be tried again another day. Watch for the next install meet.

Ah well, that's where the weekend went. I did still manage to see the Italian Grand Prix run at Monza on TV though, and was pleased Jenson Button came through to 2nd.

Keywords:

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The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 18 September 2011

Moodle / SLoodle Experiments - Issue 2

I attended a briefing about the new SLoodle 2 toolset on the EduNation III region of Second Life on Sunday 18-Sep-2011 by Paul Priebsch (avatar name: Fire Centaur). About 30 other educators were there.

The new toolset assumes a viewer that can support shared media a.k.a. media on a prim (MOAP). It currently runs in Second Life, and will soon be ported to OpenSim. It works with Moodle 1.9.x. In Moodle 2.x the quizzes may not yet function correctly, but most of the rest of the virtual world side set should. A feature of SLoodle 2 is the ability to set up "scenes" an rapidly rezz them in and around a classroom for a lesson, and then tidy them away so the ability can be re-used. The quiz chair can be set up to give rewards to students, or "penalise" them for failure... including dumping them in a shark filled pool with realistic screams!

As usual links and resources, and full size versions of these images of the demo meeting, are being gathered at http://openvce.net/sloodle

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Blog post: 22 September 2011

Moodle / SLoodle Experiments - Issue 3

A way to display good quality text is important in the classrooms. Shared Media/Media-on-a-Prim (MOAP) allows a small number (say 4-6 simultaneously active) feeds from web pages, video, Flash, etc. to be visible on prim surfaces (like screens). This can include dynamic content from Moodle and other content management systems on the web. Note that many feeds from URLs can be set up... but only a few can show at once, the others simply turning off when not in view or when too many are in view.

But it is possible to show **much** more on screen when textures are rendered in world or images are uploaded and shown i world directly from the asset data base. This is is how most presentation screen have workled in Second Life and OpenSim until recently when Shared media/MOAP appeared. The trick is to use BOTH mechanism in a classroom - using uploaded images and displays where possible, but using the small number of MOAP feeds for dynamically delivered shared content.

But what if we could show dynamic text content as well using previously uploaded content via fonts in the asset data base, with display of characters from those fonts on prims set up as a display/blackboard.

Nexii Malthus in Second Life (previously an active member of the Second Life Teen Grid, and now on the main grid) has created a very nice text display using inworld font textures to do just this. Details at https://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/NexiiText2

Keywords:

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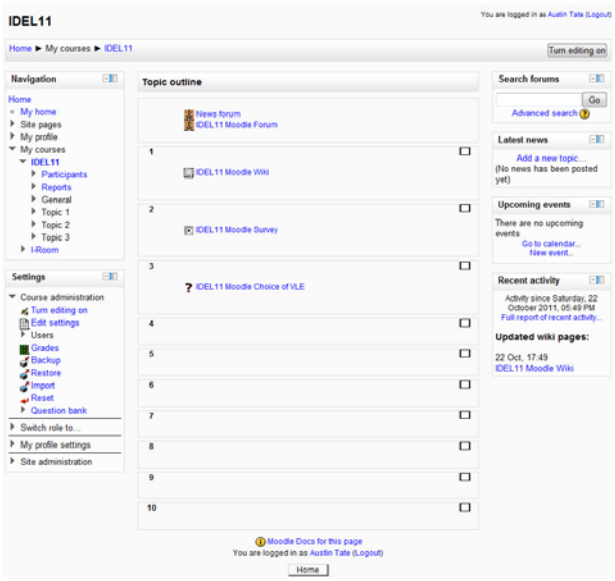
Blog post: 22 October 2011

Moodle / SLoodle Experiments - Issue 5

I have now used the admin account to set my self with a role of "course creator". Logging back on as myself I had the extra site administration menu to create a course. The setup was pretty easy and I set up a sample "IDEL11 Moodle" course... adding in a few initial "blocks" for a course collaborative Wiki (choosing simple visual NWiki editing style), a survey element, and a simple radio button style quiz showing everyone the answers to date before and after the vote.



The site uses the latest stable Moodle 2.1.1. It is not set up to scale or be properly managed so we will just add students manually for our testing. But after I get some of the basics I would be happy to let anyone on the IDEL11 course join a sample "IDEL11 Moodle" course as a student if they want to look round or have not used Moodle before.

When I have things working reasonably, I would be happy to manually add users accounts with role "Student" for other IDEL11 participants who wish to explore Moodle a little.

Keywords:

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The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 10 October 2011

Moodle / SLoodle Experiments - Issue 4

We have been held up for a while in our experimentation with Moodle/SLoodle since the new versions (2.1.2 as at 10-Oct-2011) required a later version of PHP than our servers were set to. Apache/PHP changes are strictly controlled in the School of Informatics to address securuity issues, so its not something we can change quickly. Our main servers should be updated within the next month, but meantime, we updated a test server and now have a working Moodle 2.1.2 with a standing "course" for OpenVCE experimentation.

A new PhD student has started with our group, Punyanuch Borwarnginn from Thailand, having just completed the MSc in AI here. Her work will be in the area of Intelligent Learning Environments, and she will start with looking at aspects of Moodle, SLoodle and virtual worlds-based I-Room technology. Her blog on initial ideas is at: http://openvce.net/ile-proposal

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Keywords:

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Blog post: 23 October 2011

Moodle / SLoodle Experiments - Issue 6

I have been in contact with the SLoodle development and test community in the last few week, as they are preparing a release that can work with the latest Moodle 2.1+. The time now seems right to try the alpha code version they have prepared, and after a brief exchange this week updated to 2.0.10 alpha. This could be near to being set as the first Moodle 2.0+ and 2.1+ SLoodle release. Previous versions only worked with the older Moodle 1.9+ reelases.

I have also been in touch with the SLoodle web site folks to point make suggestions on improving the descriptions of how to obtain and build a SLoodle setup. These changes were made to http://sloodle.org on 23-Oct-2011.

I now have the 2.0.10 alpha Moodle modules zip distribution and in world SLoodle rezzer object from the "Fragile" systems dispenser in Second Life on the Chilbo region:

- http://download.socialminds.jp/sloodle/sloodle_v2.0.10-alpha.zip
- http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/Chilbo/181/19/93

So, these are ready to start testing a SLoodle classroom in Second Life with our Moodle 2.1.2 setup. I have made notes and given links to assist people intererested in Moodle and SLoodle at http://openvce.net/sloodle

Addendum: Cron job now set to run every 5 minutes to handle messaging and other matters. Set up as scheduled task on the server. See http://docs.moodle.org/20/en/Cron

Keywords:

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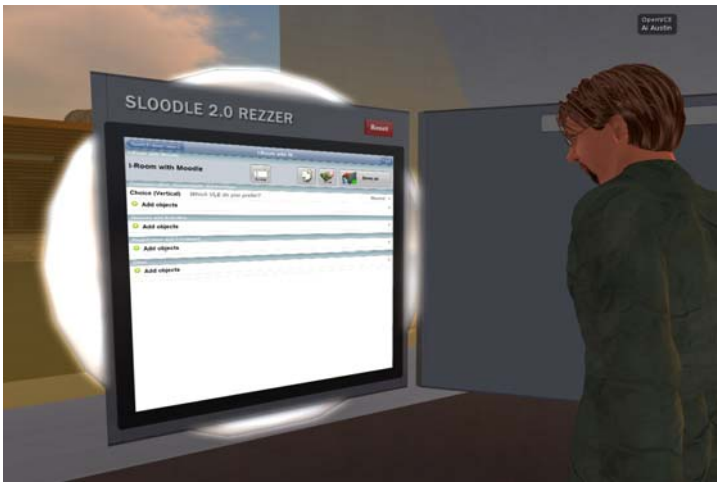
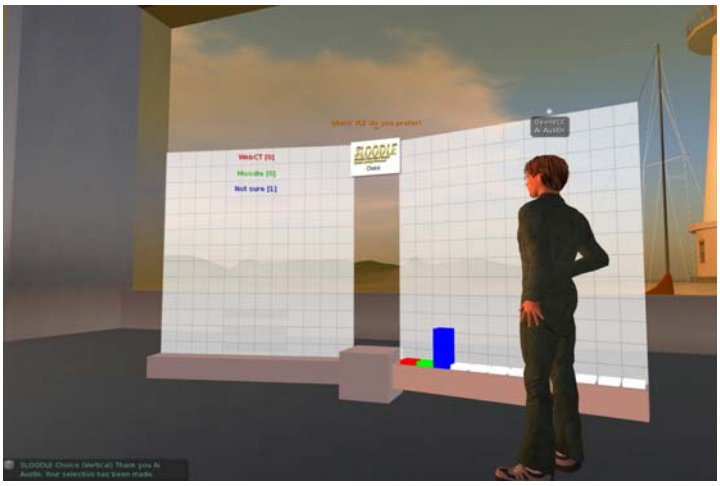
Blog post: 24 October 2011

Moodle / SLoodle Experiments - Issue 7

After a small change in a login method made by Edmund Edgar, one of the SLoodle developers, to one file at mod/set-1.0/shared_media/index.php the 2.0.10-alpha release of SLoodle works in the SLoodle classroom on the VCE region in Second Life connected to Moodle 2.1.2.

This change will be in the next build.The experimental classroom is at http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/VCE/223/226/23





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Blog post: 28 October 2011

Moodle / SLoodle Experiments - Issue 8

I have been testing elements of the SLoodle Second Life toolkit version 2.0.10 alpha alongside Moodle 2.1.2 and the SLoodle module 2.0.10 alpha with a few revisions being made by Edmund Elgar, a SLoodle developer and one of the owners of Avatar Classroom (http://avatarclassroom.com). The testing is throwing up some minor issues and a couple of PHP scripts have been changed as a

result. They will appear in the next alpha test build of SLoodle as the developers move towards the first beta version suitable for Moodle 2.

To date the tests have included:

1. chat link up between a Second Life classroom and the Moodle chat tool, and logging of authorised by individual avatars in world
2. in-world assessment delivery drop box
3. presentation screen using shared media web based image, video and web page URL assets
4. multiple choice voting and presentation display

Keywords:

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Blog post: 28 October 2011

Moodle / SLoodle Experiments - Issue 9 - Mobile Apps

There is an iPhone/iPod/iPad app called "My Moodle" which provides mobile device access to Moodle 2.1+. See http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/my-moodle/id461289000

The experimental Moodle 2.1.2 site at AIAI now has mobile web services enabled as required to support this app - they are off by default. See
http://docs.moodle.org/20/en/Enable_mobile_web_services

My initial attempts to snap a screen shot image with an iPod and upload it via the My Moodle app indicated the file exceeded the maximum upload file size, yet the PNG file involved was only 44KB... and our site is set for upload file limits of 8MB to 128MB depending on what layer is filtering.

A future road map for development of the My Mobile app is available. See http://docs.moodle.org/dev/Mobile_app

Keywords:

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The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 30 October 2011

Moodle/SLoodle Experiments Issue 10 - Cron and the Zombies

Its Halloween, and the Zombies have attacked!

There has been a bit of a struggle to get the "cron" job running on the Moodle setup. cron.php is an admin routine that is run every few minutes to do a number of maintenance things, like pulling in information feeds, external blogs, clearing away pending messages, etc. It need a bit of setting up and a couple of different mechanisms using the Windows Task Manager had not been working correctly.

I had settled on a way to initiate the cron.php script by calling it from a job every few minutes which launched the Firefox/Mozilla browser run the job, and then should have terminated. I got that suggestion off blog postings by others who has similar problems getting cron to run. It seemed to work after I set it up on testing, so I left it for a day or so... But when I came back... spookily... there were many "Zombie" processes running. My colleague experienced in these matters tells me that happens when you launch a browser to run a script in a web page and he had seen this issue before.

We are also still working to get the outward bound e-mail going on our Moodle 2.1.2 setup on Windows. This is way more complicated than it should be with many layers involved. Settings are all over the place in Apache, PHP, Moodle and beyond your machine in the SMTP server you use, as well as perhaps in multiple firewalls and out bound messaging spam filters on the way. We have been gradually picking our way through these layers. Our University will not allow e-mail out with a "from" address that is not validated as a legitimate University address - sensibly. So we are having to use a "Moodle Admin" address personally tied to a staff member at the moment, which is not ideal. We have established a "noreply" address that will validate now too. More layers to work out before its working properly I am afraid.

In general, I also am finding a lot of Moodle settings are hidden away a bit or are in several places or in multiple layers whic all need to coordinate. Things like e-mail setup is under Site Administration -> Plugins -> Message Outputs -> E-mail. The site admin/support e-mail addresses also appear there and in Site Administration -> Server -> Site Contact. Rooting round to change the roles an individual is assigned is also convoluted, rather than just a set of check boxes off the user page you have to edit roles... and not via the edit button but by knowing to click on the role title hyperlink. And some roles are considered "System Roles" which are changed on a different web page.

Keywords:

1 Comments (+/-)

1. I wonder if one day we'll look back at all these layers and think how difficult we made things for ourselves! But there is always a great deal of complexity going on even when what is on top is intuitive and straightforward. I've also been exasperated by layers and settings for both WebCT and Moodle and that's without very high level access privileges. For end users – whether teachers or students - there's a danger that by the time they've worked out where to put things, they've forgotten why they wanted to!

   On the other hand, I like the fact that this kind of work behind the scenes forces engagement with logic – and recognising that different people will employ different kinds of reasoning for how the layers should work.

   Love the Zombie!

Christine Sinclair on Tuesday, 01 November 2011, 15:28 UTC

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The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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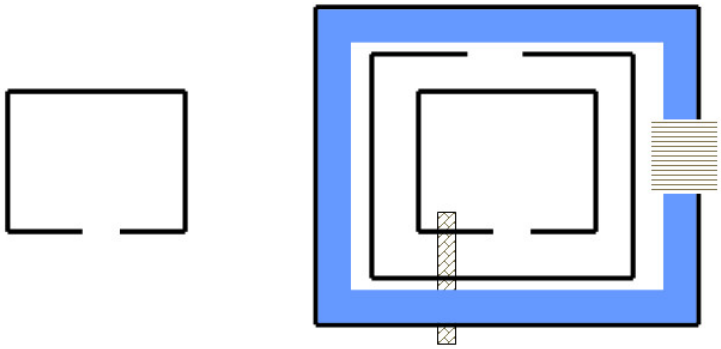
Blog post: 10 November 2011

Moodle / SLoodle Experiments Issue 11 - Walled Garden or Castle Battlements and Labyrinths

Our experience of setting up Moodle as an administrator, for a couple of sample courses of different kinds (weekly, topic based and social format) and by adding in the SLoodle module both in the web end of Moodle and in Second Life classroom has been a frustrating experience. This is a mostly due to the very many layers of user permissions, user roles, different styles of setup, confusion over what happens at site, user and course levels, and interactions between these, and so on. We still cannot work out why some users can see their SLoodle profiles and others cannot even with all permissions ticked on (more than should be needed).

This makes me think of the "Walled Garden" idea which is how I see VLEs like Blackboard's WebCT. The wall is there for a number of reasons:

- To protect those inside;
- To protect and control access to the assets inside;
- To keep out undesirables;
- To provide a clear gateway where people can enter, or request entry.



Walled Garden with Gate

Castle Defences with Moats, Drawbridges & Secret Tunnels

But my mental picture of Moodle is more like a complex arrangement of "Castle Defences" with multiple battlements, with entry points offset from one another and the direction to turn not obvious at every level. There are moats and some bridges across. But you are not sure where they all are. There may even be secret tunnels you don't know about and that others may be able to use, and you suspect there are as its all so labyrinthine.

Keywords:

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Blog post: 25 November 2011

Moodle / SLoodle Experiments Issue 12 - Customised Inworld Object

With kind support from Edmund Edgar I have been experimenting with the "Demo Object" in SLoodle, which is a stub or template for developing customised objects in Second Life or OpenSim which can connect with a corresponding module in the Moodle VLE.

Moodle Module Setup

The Moodle "demo-1.0" module is in the standard SLoodle distribution - I am using version 2.0.10 alpha. And can be found in mod/sloodle/mod/demo-1.0. The object_definitions/default.php script should be altered to "show" the object in the inworld Rezzer.

Edmund Edgar points out:

> Note that if you have syntax errors in an object definition file or extra whitespace outside the PHP brackets, lots of things will break.
>
> The in-world object will need an extra script:
> .../mod/sloodle/mod/set-1.0/sloodle_rezzer_object.lsl
> which deals with setting up communication with the server, and sends linked messages to any other scripts in it with information about the Moodle server it needs to connect to, and any other configuration parameters it might have.

Inworld Object Setup

1. An object should be created in world with default name "SLOODLE Demo Object" or an alias "SLOODLE 1.1 Demo Object" both of which are permitted by settings which act as exemplars in object_definitions/default.php
2. Into this object, two scripts should be placed. One is obtained from .../mod/sloodle/mod/demo-1.0/sloodle_mod_demo-1.0.lsl The other is a generic script and can be obtained from .../mod/sloodle/mod/set-1.0/sloodle_rezzer_object.lsl. These are the base that can be used to create a custom module.
3. Set the permissions of the in world object and its scripts as appropriate and then take a copy into inventory.
4. Drop that object into the contents of the inworld SLOODLE Rezzer.

You should now be able to use the Rezzer as normal to select an appropriate SLOODLE controller and scene, and then under "Other" objects you will find the "Demo Object" which you can add to the scene. After it rezzes in a default position close by the Rezzer, reposition it where you want, and then hit the "Freeze" button on the Rezzer screen to sync the current position of the scene objects.

Other Templates

There are some other objects in the SLoodle kit which can also act as guides, such as the "SLOODLE Tracker Button" which when clicked in world communicates with a Moodle module and gives a message back.

Current Status

At the time of writing I have the SLOODLE Demo Objects rezzing from the SLOODLE Rezzer, but don't yet have Moodle responding through it. Testing continues.

Keywords:

1 Comments (+/-)

1. At 14:25 10/12/2011, Edmund Edgar wrote:

XML-RPC is used by the distributor tool to allow you to choose an object in Moodle and get it sent to an avatar in-world. IIRC it isn't used anywhere else. We plan to rewrite that to use HTTP-in instead, but we haven't got around to it yet, as we've found XML-RPC unreliable in the past.

It wouldn't surprise me if a grid that doesn't allow incoming XML-RPC doesn't allow incoming HTTP-in either. That would break Sloodle 2 rezzer, and also the mechanism that we use for updating the new scoreboard when scores change. We'll be using HTTP-in more in future, so it will break more tools going forward.

We do have a plan to add a method to fall back on HTTP polling for situations where HTTP-in won't work (either because the Moodle won't let traffic out or because the grid won't let it in), but it'll probably be a while until we do it.

Austin Tate on Saturday, 10 December 2011, 16:39 UTC

Imported at: 10/12/2011 16:39 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 06 December 2011

Moodle / SLoodle Experiments Issue 13 - External Tools as Course Activities

Moodle 2.2 released today (6-Dec-2011) includes a facility which allows for the embedding of tools that are provided externally as activities on courses. Close integration is possible using the IMS Global Learning Tool Interoperability (IMS LTI) standard. See http://www.somerandomthoughts.com/blog/2011/11/28/moodle-2-supports-connecting-to-ims-lti-tools/

But the same mechanism allows for effectively any external tool to be easily embedded (above showing the Edinburgh MSc in e-Learning IDEL11 Course Holyrood Park ELGG Blog). The simple mechanism just means you input the URL from which the tool or contents are served. More advanced facilities allow for proper IMS LTI integration. See the image of the advanced version of the tool options.

Keywords:

Imported at: 06/12/2011 15:43 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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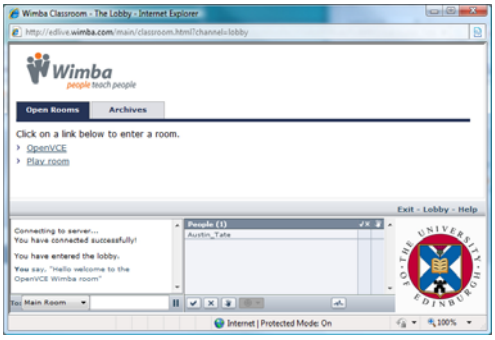
Blog post: 19 September 2011

Wimba Classroom Tests

On the suggestion of Fiona Littleton of Information Services, and a tutor on the MSc in e-Learning, I have had a Wimba Classroom set up for test related to the Open Virtual Collaboration Environment in OpenVCE.net



Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:41 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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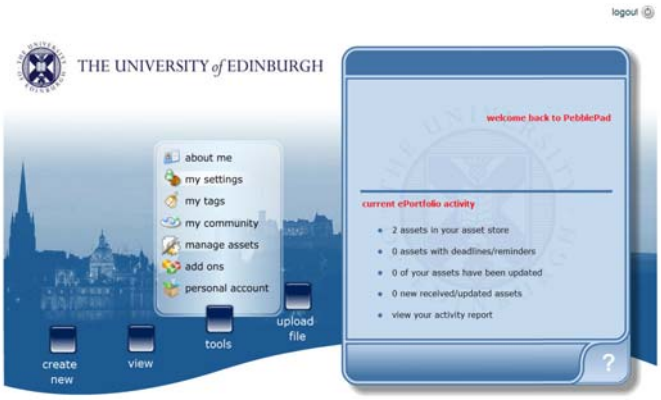
Blog post: 21 October 2011

Exploring the PebblePad ePortfolio



The PebblePad ePortfolio system is used to support personal learning spaces in the University of Edinburgh

- http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/information-services/services/learning-technology/e-portfolios
- http://www.jisc.ac.uk/eportfolio

If on EASE, you can log in via http://www.pebblepad.co.uk/edinburgh/pebblepad.aspx or launch from a button on MyEd with EASE login as student (MyEd - under Studies tab) or staff (MyEd - under Teaching tab).

My first experience indicated that creation of a trivial note with a few pasted web links was a very time consuming process, far beyond its value... and the resulting links note was poorly accessible with many steps to retrieve it or edit it. The system seems designed for a very small number of assets rather than many tyhousands of assets in complex structures that would be needed in a serious personal learning environment for the future.

Keywords:

1 Comments (+/-)

1. Interesting. Some links for convenience:
    - http://www.leapspecs.org/2A/ - move work between e-Portfolio systems
    - http://mahara.org/ - open source e-Portfolio

Austin Tate on Wednesday, 16 November 2011, 17:35 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:42 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 21 October 2011

Personal Learning Environments and Mashup Spaces

I like to create a web page when I start a new project... to add in the useful web links, pointers to information, notes, etc. Then I gradually structure that as more content is created. Most recently I have been doing that in the Drupal content management system on http://openvce.net which provides convenient additional facilities such as column layout, blocks in to which content can be placed, mash-up capabilities right down to adding custom HTML and PHP code, and ancillary blogging, image handling, etc.

But for the MSc activities I chose to do some of this in my own web area at http://atate.org which initially just had my work on the "bat Life Wall" and where I wanted to collect together assets that would be long lived. I have more recently added extra areas there for my course blogs and Lifestream, my Junior Hairdressing experience for the ULOE11 module, and the virtual ethnography study for the Digital Cultures EDEDC11 module. There is also a password protected personal work area.

For work in week 6 of the IDEL11 course we will be exploring personal learning spaces and mash-ups, and so I have tried to look to do something new... something I have been meaning to explore for a

while. I wanted to use a much more flexible layout that is cleaner, and adapts to the width of anyone's viewer. And into which I can drop elements without causing problems of rendering in the wide range of browsers.

I am experimenting at http://atate.org/space/ which such a personal working space. It is based on a freely available and nice simple CSS style sheet from http://matthewjamestaylor.com/. I have customised it somewhat for my sans serif font preference and colour choices. I added initial content that I had been collecting at http://openvce,.net./mscel and put in quick access tabs for my current MSc work and blogs.

Keywords:

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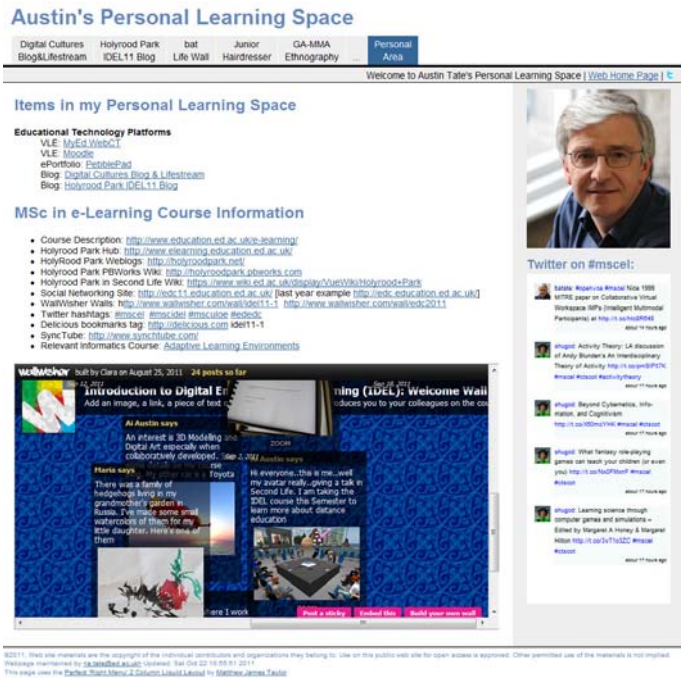
Blog post: 22 October 2011

Austin's Personal Learning Space

I have begun to create my Personal Learning Space... for which I prefer a flexible web site in an area that can outlive specific technologies and institutional changes. If I invest time in creating things like this I want to feel they can be preserved for use in future. Using proprietary products frustrates me as I know they will be lost or become unavailable sooner rather than later usually. The space uses a new (to me) flexible width flowing layout in CSS that should be useful in future projects. I have been meaning to try such a layout for a while, and this was the perfect excuse. It should work on most browsers and mobile platforms. Tests to date are positive in that respect. The site uses my usually folder structure to keep things neat, with all style elements in one directory (inc), images in another (img), further resources (res), and a password protected area for items that cannot be made public, but which I want to gather into the space for convenience. The site also uses, as is normal for my projects, relative URLs throughout so it can be rehosted easily, parts reused in other projects, or the whole site cut to a DVD/CD for archive.



For now the Personal Learning Space just gives quick access tabs to work already done on the MSc in e-Learning, a few blocks of embedded Twitter and the WallWisher for the IDEL11 course, and some useful links for the courses I am on which I previously had scattered across http://openvce.net/mscel and in desktop shortcuts across a number of desktops, a laptop and several mobile devices. The initial space is at http://atate.org/space/.

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:42 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 22 October 2011

Proprietary or Open Products for Personal Learning Spaces?

I believe that in future students when they first join a good educational institution should be given access to an e-mail address or equivalent, individual blog and a resources space which they can use for life. It will support them while a student, and later in their professional lives and into retirement. It will allow for alumni and continuing educational engagement. But it will be primarily centred on being a service and benefit to the individual, not as a marketing mechanism for the hosting institution. It must be secure and not allowed to be sold to some external hosting company for data mining. It must use open standards and allow for ease of movement across to a new institution in whole or in part. It should allow the user to create and store assets they can use via a single stable URL or URI for life... images, documents, assignments, artifacts or various kinds. And reliably embed them in

The current mode of using proprietary products that lack standards, and are poor at import and export, militates against this.

Keywords:

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Blog post: 04 November 2011

Personal Profiles

My interest in personal portable information stores and information predates my use of the approach as a PLE.

I am interested in a computer-based personal assistant and ways in which that could build information to help you throughout your life. Issues of privacy and ownership and location of that information immediately are an issue when that is contemplated. Its clear to me that this means the data must be owned, hosted and controlled by an individual in some way, and ANY access to it approved and logged at the user ownership end. This is WAY WAY different to its being hosted and accesible to Facebook and Google+ (or an Institution like a government, insurance company or teaching organisation).

I liked recently a pointer from Daniel Griffin on the MSc Digital Cultures course on the Diaspora Freedom in Software community (http://diasporafoundation.org/ and https://joindiaspora.com/) and specifically to Eben Moglen's "Freedom in The Cloud" presentation at NYU Feb 5 2010. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QOEMv0S8AcA

I was reminded of some discussions I had 20 years ago with telecoms providers about a user centric architecture for use of personal profile information from a computer-based personal assistant. the personal information was served on each request from the user end and with access to information and resources controlled by the user... WAY WAY different o how we have come to use Facebook and Google+ where our data is in their servers and used when they want for their benefit.

Section 3 - The Personal Profile - From http://www.aiai.ed.ac.uk/~bat/tania.pdf

One important feature of the approach to be taken is that the concept of a long lived Personal Profile for communications and information use will be established. It will be a guarantee of the approach that the information that an individual builds in their co-worker personal profile will be able to stand alone and be meaningful outside of its specific use in this particular generation of information agent. We will establish the concept of a separate transportable personal profile that can accompany the user for the rest of his or her life and can grow with him or her.

Keywords:

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Blog post: 07 November 2011

PLEs and the Technicalities

My earlier blog postings have described my own preferred approach to the creation of a PLE which at its outer level is simply an easily customised web page. I chose a freely available well constructed CSS1 stylesheet that maximised the viewable area of the central content when viewed on a wide range fo devices and browsers, using a layout that allows for flexible width. Below this top levele entry web page a number of directories hold the locally stored content, for my own images, screenshots, and resources that it is suitable to provide locally (i.e. have no copyright issues) and these can be pulled into the web page via relative URLs to allow for the whole PLE to be easily shifted to a new hosting environment, used locally off a memory stick, or cut to CD. The resources and

images can also be used in other blogging and course discussion forums via URL reference where appropriate.

This approach works fine for me, as I am comfortable with using a simple text editor to edit HTML directly, and have a simplistic but working understanding of the CSS style sheet approach. I also can access an area where I can store and serve the files easily. But this custom approach is not suitable for all. Technically a way to create such a custom web area and make changing its content and layout easier would be preferable for some. There are many drag and drop frameworks for dropping in content in "frames" and an emerging set of "widgets" that can be dropped into "containers" in such self hosted web sites using a number of script libraries. Again, this can be quite technical to initially set up, but easy to use thereafter. I do worry about the long term stability of some of these mechanisms though, and they do mean that the contents have to be served using a web server, rather than it being possible to simply copy and use the files on a memory stick or off a CD locally on a single computer off-line Some blogging frameworks like WordPress, richer content management systems like Drupal and Joomla, and commercial platforms like iGoogle provide simple approaches for columns of content with inclusion of "blocks" made up of various types of content, widgets and frames.

The issue of security and legality must also be taken into account. there can be legal constraints on the monitoring which an institution is obliged to perform on its own staff communications, and in some cases on the official communications of its students. Issues of copyright infringement may also need to be investigated. These legal requirements can be made more difficult in highly decentralised and personalised environments.

A study of the use of personal web sites as the basis for PLEs at Graz University of Technology (UT Graz) in Austria (Taraghi et al., 2010) described a set of issues to be considered before going on to describe their own framework and approach. They base their approach on work by Schaffert & Hilzensauer who describe seven crucial aspects to consider in the adoption of PLEs:

- The role of the learner
- Personalisation
- Content
- Social involvement
- Educational & organisational

So, it is important to look at ways in which the basic approach of using a personalised web page and web area as the basis for a PLE might be made more widely accessible and accesptable within the constraints of an educational institution's role and requirements. An educational establishment can encourage the use of PLEs alongside their institutional learning support systems. It could seek to provide a framework or "template" approach which all students can adopt and adapt a framework or arrangement that suits them, and that they feel comfortable supports them and the degree of autonomy they seek.

Reference

Schaffert, S. and Hilzensauer, W (2008) "On the way towards Personal Learning Environments: Seven crucial aspects," in eLearning Papers, no. 9, July, 2008.

Taraghi, B., Ebner, M., Till, G. and Muhlburger, H. (2010) "Personal Learning Environment - A Conceptual Study", iJET - Volume 5, Special Issue 1: "ICL2009 - MashUps for Learning", January 2010.

Keywords:

1 Comments (+/-)

1. Thanks for making this entry public, Austin - I think there are some valuable insights here for us all about the tensions between personal and institutional requirements of PLEs and some useful references for anyone interested in pursuing this further (I'm assuming they are useful – I'm just about to go and look for them myself!) Some of the communications in the discussion boards and the blogs suggest this as an important topic for debate.

Christine Sinclair on Wednesday, 09 November 2011, 10:15 UTC

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The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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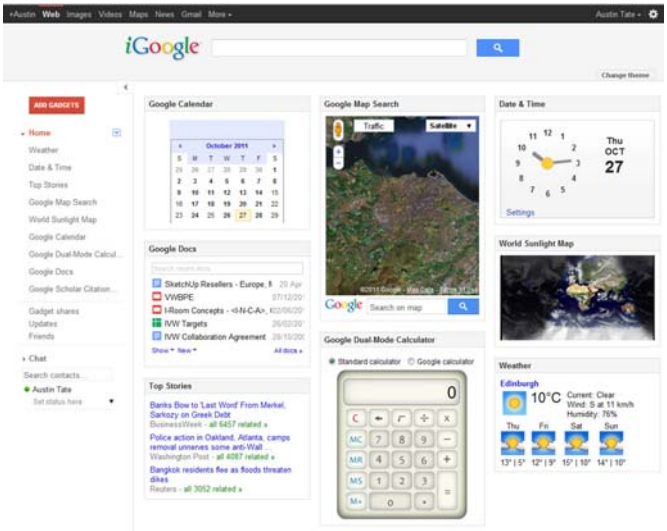
Blog post: 16 November 2011

PLE Examples - iGoogle

iGoogle is sometimes used as a framework for an individual's PLE, since it provides a convenient and readily accessible "container" for a range of widgets and content items which can easily be added and removed. It is also relatively open in the types of widget and content that can be embedded.



My iGoogle page is here... I occasionally have it up on a secondary computer as its convenient to have the calculator, search functions and quick links to my Google calendar, contacts, e-mail etc. I also like the world map with sun shadow widget which can be made full screen on the secondary computer screen which is a nice. Better than buying the $3,000 executive version :-)

Keywords:

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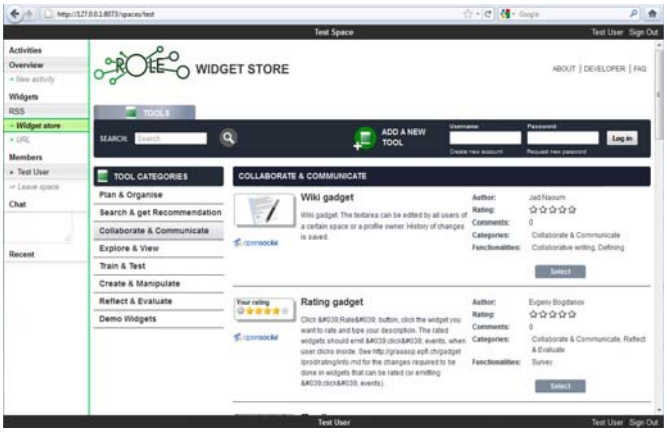
Blog post: 15 November 2011

ROLE Model - Responsive Open Learning Environments

Responsive Open Learning Environments (ROLE - http://www.role-project.eu/) is an EU project which provides an interesting example of a learning environment being created with an open widget based approach which might allow for a personal learning environment to be created by an individual within the context of a managed learning environment for a course.



It makes use of the OpenSocial (http://opensocial.org) API for widgets to allow for a range of community contributed widgets to be used.

There is an Open University provided introductory course on ROLE and information on incorporating ROLE elements into a Personal Learning Environment accessible at http://labspace.open.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=7433

Keywords:

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The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Engagement with Other Distance Education Courses at Edinburgh and Beyond

Engagement with Other Distance Education Courses at Edinburgh and Beyond

This section bring together a few choice posts on some elements of work on other MSC in e-Learning courses I wanted to share with fellow course participants. In particular my ULOE11 "Learning Challenge" which was to be trained in blow-drying technique.

It also shows a post related to a distance education delivered AI course I took part in at Stanford University with 150,000 registered participants. It was interesting to see how the assessment and class interactions were managed.

Top

Blog post: 17 October 2011

Distance Education Stanford AI Class Underway

I am sitting in on the distance learning MSc Introduction to AI Class at Stanford - http://www.ai-class.com/ - to observe the way they use technolgy for distance education. They seem to make very good use of short multiple choice answers and "click over the options" type quizzes after each brief video segment to make sure people are understanding. I also see they will be using "badges" to show progress in the class and its assignments.

For those of you that have not heard of this... its believed to be the largest distance learning class ever - with 150,000 registered students.

Keywords:

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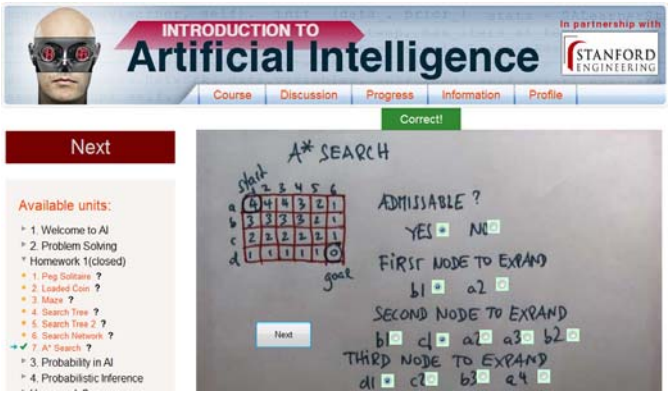
Blog post: 22 October 2011

Stanford AI Class - Largest Ever Distance Education Course

I am enrolled on the on-line Stanford AI Class... http://ai-class.com - along with 150,000 others - to watch how they present and deliver the "Introduction to AI" course, to see how the on-line assessment and quizzes work, and to see how student interaction with tutors and each other is arranged. Its been an interesting experience so far. Everyone seems to be enjoying the course and the community. The short video segments for each lecture are broken up with quizzes to check understanding as you go along. Often with check boxes and type in areas overlaid with the video material itself.



Keywords:

2 Comments (+/-)

1. Hi Austin. I'm enrolled in the AI class too, although I've switched to a basic enrollment so I don't have to keep up with the homework. I'm finding it hard to find enough hours in the week on top of work and IDEL. In fact I'm a bit behind I think, having only done the first two units, but so far I'm fiding the experience worthwhile. The videos are really clearly presented and the way the course id designed to take you through the material step by step works well with this kind of subjetc matter. I think this brings out that padagogy has to be suited to the area of study. IDEL is very discursive and the sorts of tasks and resources we have reflect that.

   With the AI class, contrastingly, I appreciate the more linear progression as the material in each lesson often builds directly on previous videos. What do you think?

s9347311 on Sunday, 23 October 2011, 22:07 UTC

2. I was realistic and registered for Basic Mode access from the start I wanted to see how the courses were structured and delivered... and how the quizzes, online assessment and class contacts worked for such a large class.

   I agree... for this course there is a lot of material and there are well established text books and flows to get people through it. I like the frequent short quizzes to check understanding. I found I had a lot of out by one counting errors on paths through search trees... as I was probably not paying sufficient attention to the question... so I left out start nodes in the count and so on. But it made you think.

   This goes beyond distance education. I think quizzes like this could work in on-campus lessons as well... everyone will have some sort of mobile device (or could be lent one for the session) that could link the to a class wide quiz and feedback session.. much like clickers are used in some lectures today.

Austin Tate on Monday, 24 October 2011, 09:22 UTC

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:50 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 19 October 2011

Junior Hairdresser - Lesson 1

As part of my "Learning Challenge" for the Understanding Learning in the On-line Environment module, I have now had my first lesson... it was exciting going to class again and in a totally different environment. Reminds of the the great buzz I always sense at the start of each new academic year amongst students and staff!

There was a LOT to take in.. but Karen Temple who is training me took things step by step. She was keen not to over do the theory and looking at books, so I got introduced right away to my "model" for the day... a disembodied head on a tripod.. but with a lovely head of hair on her to work on. It was washed and left tousled to let me learn on it.

But first we went through the various brush types... and parts of the comb. See http://atate.org/mscel/hair/. Then onto how the hair is "sectioned" to allow it to be worked on in parts and layers. It was very tricky to know where to place your hands and fingers to get best grip on the hair... and I was not separating the parts very well. I realised I was thinking about it a bit too much and when I did it a bit sloppier (at first) I got the rhythm more I think.

It took some two hours to fix my model's hair this first time. That would be a LONG appointment. Anyway she has come home with me now for homework. So I am asked to go in next week and show Karen how I can do the whole job. And the plan is that I will then be let loose on a live model. Now that will be a thrilling experience for me... and I bet for her - hopefully not in the horror film sense!

Keywords:

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The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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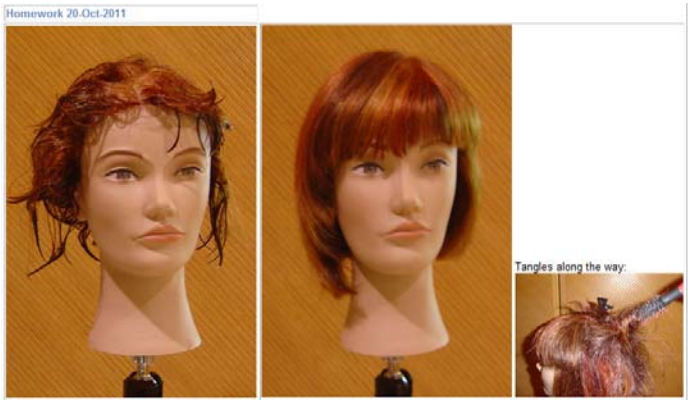
Blog post: 20 October 2011

Junior Hairdresser - Homework 1



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The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 25 October 2011

Junior Hairdresser - Passing on the Skill

For a full photo diary and report on my ULOE11 Learning Challenge see http://atate.org/mscel/hair/

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:55 UTC
The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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Blog post: 26 October 2011

Junior Hairdresser - Live Model

Emma very patiently let me do her hair today during my training session:

I now have access to the Hairdressing Foundations e-Teaching course at http://eteachhairdressing.co.uk along with some exercises to complete there. I have also been given

Hairdressing Trainee Model Sheets showing my experience and an assessment of my progress. They will appear in my Hairdresser Training Photo Log at http://atate.org/mscel/hair/ and are available via a link on my new Personal Learning Space at http://atate.org/space/

Keywords:

Imported at: 02/12/2011 12:56 UTC
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Blog post: 26 October 2011

Junior Hairdresser - Final Assessment

Here is my assessment as a trainee hairdresser on blow drying... from the first go to my final attempt on a live model today.

JASON HALL HAIRDRESSING MODEL SHEET

ASSISTANT NAME AUSTIN TATE
TRAINER NAME KAREN TEMPLE
DATE 26th/10/2011

STYLE DETAIL: Blowdrying a mid-length graduated "Bob" on dolls head

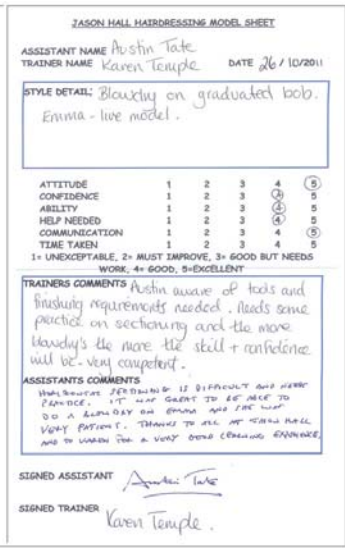
ATTITUDE	1	2	3	4	5
CONFIDENCE	1	2	3	4	5
ABILITY	1	2	3	4	5
HELP NEEDED	1	2	3	4	5
COMMUNICATION	1	2	3	4	5
TIME TAKEN	1	2	3	4	5

1= UNEXCEPTABLE, 2= MUST IMPROVE, 3= GOOD BUT NEEDS WORK, 4= GOOD, 5=EXCELLENT

TRAINERS COMMENTS
Austin's enthusiasm to his blowdry is exceptional. Very willing to learn. He will on further practice improve his knowledge and skills. Well done!

ASSISTANTS COMMENTS
A VERY ENTHUSIASTIC EXPERIENCE, AND WHEN I SHOWED ME THE "TOOLS OF THE TRADE" AND SHOWED ME THE BASIC STEPS VERY CLEARLY. IT WAS GOOD TO GET STRAIGHT ON WITH A PRACTICAL.

SIGNED ASSISTANT Austin Tate
SIGNED TRAINER Karen Temple


JASON HALL HAIRDRESSING MODEL SHEET

ASSISTANT NAME Austin Tate
TRAINER NAME Karen Temple
DATE 26/10/2011

STYLE DETAIL: Blowdry on graduated bob. Emma - live model.

ATTITUDE	1	2	3	4	5
CONFIDENCE	1	2	3	4	5
ABILITY	1	2	3	4	5
HELP NEEDED	1	2	3	4	5
COMMUNICATION	1	2	3	4	5
TIME TAKEN	1	2	3	4	5

1= UNEXCEPTABLE, 2= MUST IMPROVE, 3= GOOD BUT NEEDS WORK, 4= GOOD, 5=EXCELLENT

TRAINERS COMMENTS Austin aware of tools and finishing requirements needed. Needs some practice on sectioning and the more blowdry's the more the skill + confidence will be - very competent.

ASSISTANTS COMMENTS
HORIZONTAL SECTIONING IS DIFFICULT AND NEEDS PRACTICE. IT WAS GREAT TO BE ABLE TO DO A BLOWDRY ON EMMA AND SHE WAS VERY PATIENT. THANKS TO ALL AT SHOW HALL AND TO WARREN FOR A VERY GOOD LEARNING EXPERIENCE.

SIGNED ASSISTANT Austin Tate
SIGNED TRAINER Karen Temple.

Keywords:

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Engagement Beyond

Engagement Beyond

I collect together in this section a number of postings related to my engagement with other communities beyond the distance education work.

This includes my engagement with the OpenSimulator community, for which I am on the development team as a testing member. We run a 4 host OpenSim grid called "Openvue" which is kept at the very latest versions for test purposes, and is set up to allow cross-grid transport via the "HyperGrid".

We also have regions on OSGrid (which has 70,000 users), New World Grid (in France) and the US Army's non-classified MOSES grid. I am a member of the Steering Board for MOSES.

Some recent work has also involved experimentation with Unity3D as an alternative 3D virtual world platform.

A couple of the postings related to the death in October 2011 of Prof. John McCarthy, pioneer of AI and someone I knew personally. The short piece on the "Robot and the Baby" was originally written at the request of an editor at the New York Times for a potential round up of famous people who had died in 2011, but was not selected to go into the final cut.

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Blog post: 21 October 2011

MOSES Office Hours

MOSES: Military Open Simulator Enterprise Strategy (http://openvce.net/moses) - is an OpenSim grid used for research purposes by educators and a range of organisation exploring simulation

technology for training. I am owner of a region on the grid for Open Virtual Collaboration Environment work with the US Army, and am a member of the Board of Directors who guide the development of MOSES.

The image is of one of the Office Hours meetings between estate owners...

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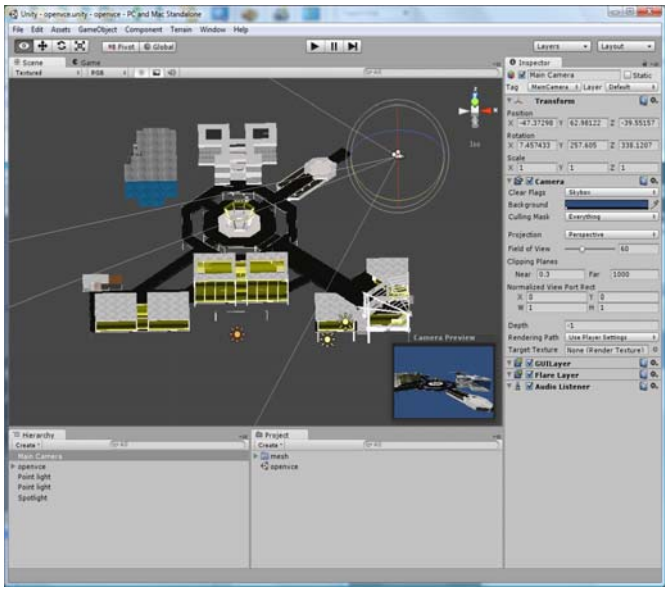
Blog post: 30 November 2011

OpenVCE Virtual Worlds Assets moved from OpenSim to Unity3D via Tipodean Collada Converter

On my research project related to supporting the OpenVCE communities at http://openvce.net/ I was engaged in setting up a new group portal on the APAN (All Partners Access Network) hosted by the US Government for non-classified work between government agencies, NGOs, organisation and individuals across the world. This replaces the previous HarmonieWeb portal. the APAN network uses the Telligent Collaboration framework to provide the usual blogs, discussion forums, wikis, group chat, etc. And then provides an Adobe Connect service attached to that for the supported communities. We provide "web observer" meeting access to virtual words meeting spaces via Adobe Connect services through these portals. I was involved in a number of training programmes and setup exercises as I took on the group owner role on APAN.

I did some further experimentation with the Unity3D platform, and used a Collada mesh translation of the OpenVCE OpenSim region buildings created via a converter service from Tipodean technologies in the USA. We are further experimenting also with the OpenSim-based MOSES grid hosted by the US Government also for work with non-government agencies internationally.



We believe that a combination of the APAN OpenVCE Group for a community web portal and a simplified meeting space in either the OpenSim-based MOSES grid or on a Unity3D setup might offer a long term stable basis for continuing work in the OpenVCE.net community. Currently a Drupal server at Edinburgh is used for the community web portal, and the virtual words service is hosted on the VCE region in Second Life.

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The original blog post this was imported from is here.

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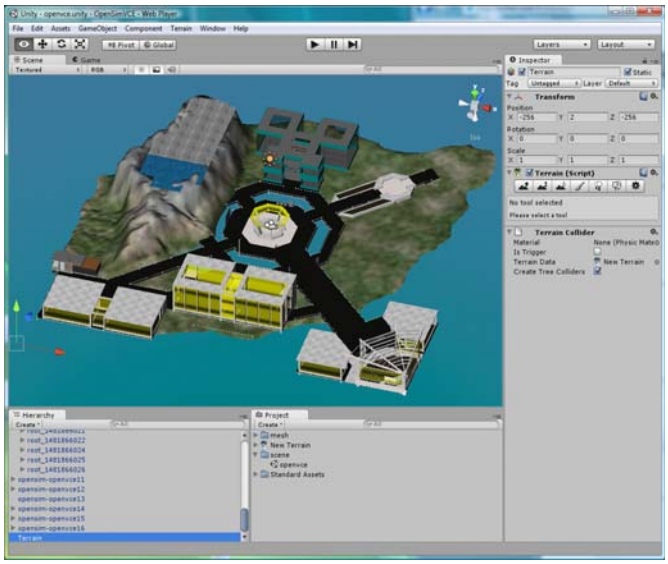
Blog post: 07 December 2011

I-Room in Unity3D with Multi-User Chat, VoIP and Collaboration Tools

A number of people are investigating Unity3D as a 3D graphics engine for virtual worlds. It can be delivered through a web browser on a range of platforms including mobile devices. It might offer a light weight alternative to Second Life and OpenSim.

I have created a simple I-Room from scratch, built that into a complex Unity3D terrain and incorporated very simple avatars as an exercise in learning about Unity3D. I have also experimented with two different multi-user server addons - SmartFox Pro and Photon. I have embedded the Unity3D virtual world view into a web page alongside collaboration widgets to provide Twitter following of a given #tag, VoIP via Tokbox, and a Dabbleboard for showing presentations and giving a shared whiteboard. The demo systems are all available via http://www.aiai.ed.ac.uk/~ai/unity/

Even better, there are a number of groups interested in content exchange from OpenSim to Unity3D. An example is the recent conversion of the OpenVCE collaboration region which was originally on the Second Life VCE region, ported to OpenSim and then converted through Tipodean's Collada Converter for use in Unity3D. It is now available for use under the flexible Lesser GPL licence.



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Blog post: 27 October 2011

John McCarthy - Pioneer of AI

You may have heard that John McCarthy died this week. See

- http://news.stanford.edu/news/2011/october/john-mccarthy-obit-102511.html
- http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2011/oct/25/john-mccarthy

John was an early pioneer of AI, inventor of Lisp, and indeed originator of the term "AI" in 1956. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_McCarthy_(computer_scientist). It is good to see how broad and expansive John McCarthy's vision for computing was:

> From Wikipedia: In 1961, he was the first to publicly suggest (in a speech given to celebrate MIT's centennial) that computer time-sharing technology might lead to a future in which computing power and even specific applications could be sold through the utility business model (like water or electricity).

Take a look also at his short sci-fi story "The Robot and the Baby" for some great fiction (or is it?) about future robotics. See

- http://www-formal.stanford.edu/jmc/robotandbaby/robotandbaby.html

I worked with John both before and after his formal retirement, and it was a very enjoyable experience. His interest in formalising the notion of "context" was his most recent work which I spoke to him about. The ability to "assert that the proposition p is true in the context c" is a key to much of what we do in planning... and my own work some 30 years ago was involved with something I called "functions in context" that had similar aims.

Keywords:

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Blog post: 16 November 2011

John McCarthy – The Robot and the Baby

Professor John McCarthy died on 24th October 2011 at the age of 84. He was an early pioneer of computer technology, computer time-sharing, and inventor of LISP, one of the very first computer programming languages. LISP was, radically, based on symbolic computing. He was an early pioneer of Artificial Intelligence, and indeed originator of the term "AI" which was adopted following the title he gave to a conference at Dartmouth College in Vermont which John convened in the summer of 1956. John received the Turing Award, and many other accolades and honours, including the United States National Medal of Science.

John McCarthy was known to many of us in the Artificial Intelligence community as the "Father of AI", and I came to know him as very much a baby in the subject. In my student days in the early 1970s he appeared on the BBC TV program "Controversy" in debate with Sir James Lighthill on the value of research on general purpose robots alongside my PhD supervisor, Donald Michie, himself an AI pioneer and war time code breaker who had worked with Alan Turing at Bletchley Park. He wrote and communicated widely on his interests in robot decision making.

Typical of John's desire to communicate about his field was a short sci-fi story he wrote in 2001, "The Robot and the Baby" which has many interesting themes, and to me epitomises his breadth of interests, politics and fascinating opinions. A capable companion robot – "Robot Model number GenRob337L3, serial number 337942781--R781 for short" – was one of many deployed to assist people and deliberately made unappealing and emasculated by the constraints society had placed on robot use.

The story begins:

> "Mistress, your baby is doing poorly. He needs your attention."
> "Stop bothering me, you …" … "Love the … baby, yourself."

John amusingly includes a long line of reasoning by R781 in the bracketed notation of LISP on probabilities of the baby being harmed if it disobeys its key constraints:

```
(= (Command 337) (Love Travis))
(True (Not (Executable (Command 337))) (Reason (Impossible-for robot (Action Love))))
(Will-cause (Not (Believes Travis) (Loved Travis)) (Die Travis))
(= (Value (Die Travis)) -0.883)
(Will-cause (Believes Travis (Loves R781 Travis) (Not (Die Travis))))
…
```

With this reasoning R781 decided that the value of simulating loving Travis and thereby saving its life was greater by 0.002 than the value of obeying the directive to not simulate a person. There follows a progressively escalating series of events where the whole world is watching the handling of the situation by the authorities, and commenting in real time on the event on social media - anticipating Twitter by some years.

Read the story (at http://www-formal.stanford.edu/jmc/robotandbaby.html) if you want to explore an informed opinion on the ethics, issues and dilemmas involved in human and robot interaction, which one day we may face. The story has many thought provoking elements. I personally feel for the emasculated robot that is left in the Smithsonian.

Keywords:

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Summary

Summary

To conclude this presentation, I include a blog posting reflecting back on the aims I original described for participation in the MSc in e-Learning, and a nice round up post showing all IDEL11 participants finally meeting "face-to-face" in Adobe Connect.

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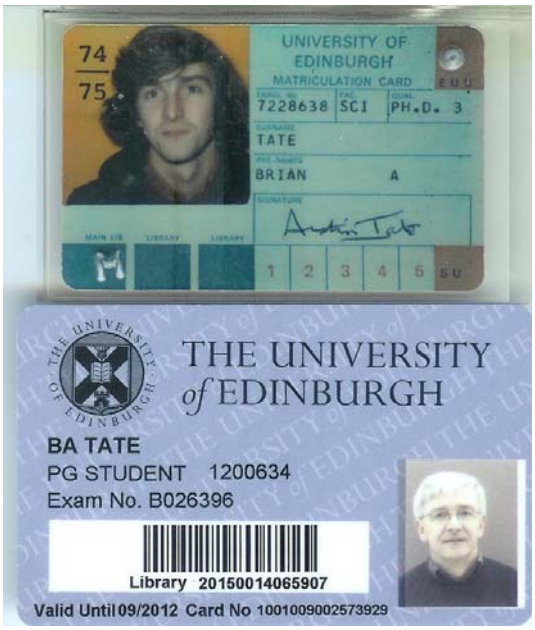
Blog post: 02 December 2011

Reflections at the End of the IDEL11 Course

At the very start of the course I did a blog post to set down some of my objectives for engaging on the MSc in e-Learning. See http://holyroodpark.net/atate/weblog/6132.html

It has been a fascinating experience joining in and seeing things as a student. Going through the EUCLID application process was also useful to do. I had a few glitches but the support to sort them out worked very well indeed and was very quick. I really had to get references and degree certificate copies to support my application. I then realized that even as a University of Edinburgh staff member I needed to apply for a grant to pay my fees.. times have changed. Its also fun to have a student card again after 40 years. I had longer hair in those days.



Becoming a learner again with directed reading lists after so long setting my own research reading agenda was enlightening. It took me quite some time to settle down to get on top of the volume of reading involved.. though I am on three courses this first Semester which did not help. But once I had some target artifacts to produce and themes in mind, my usual more applied focus kicked in and the readings became much more interesting.

The IDEL11 and Digital Cultures courses have allowed me to be introduced to and use a very wide variety of educational technology, or collaborative social media in an educational setting. This has been very useful indeed as my research focus is on the use of social media to support rich collaboration in communities such as for emergency responders. The tools used are similar, and the communities have exercise and training needs that are educational in nature. When I look back over the course period and think of how many tools and variants I have used it is astonishing. My blog shows the breadth of involvement with many of them, and the depth with a few such as the Moodle open source Virtual Learning Environment.

The in depth look at Moodle 2.x via mounting and administering a Moodle site was interesting, and is now in use by people in Informatics, Education , a PhD student looking at intelligent learning environments, and the person responsible for VLE discussion at Science and Engineering College level. This is useful early access and experience given the likely adoption of Moodle for distance learning support in the University.

My research interest in collaboration for training and exercise support for communities involved in emergency response was mainly supported by readings undertaken on the Understanding Learning in On-line Environments (UOL11) course and I have chosen to do my essay on that course in an area of scenario-based education and the psychological studies on "the Power of Stories" which is helping me achieve a deeper understanding of some of the reasons why simulation-based training can work so well in some intrinsically motivated communities.

This has been a most interesting course and experience, and I am very grateful for all the enthusiasm and support offered by Christine Sinclair my tutor, the other tutors on IDEL11, and the great level of interaction by all I have worked with on the MSc in e-Learning modules to date.

Keywords:

1 Comments (+/-)

1. I have always enjoyed the juxtaposition of your student reflections with your professional ones, and the way the perspectives influence each other. It does seem as though a different angle provides a new "take" on an issue, something I also discovered as a student on the same course. Working through so many activities and different kinds of spaces for a new purpose has provided valuable insights on the nature of those activities, technological affordances and channels of communication. I'm certain that your own communities are benefiting from the enhanced perspective - just as your professional background has had much to offer the participants in *this* environment.

   Times may have changed and hair got shorter (love the photos - I have similar ones!) but you have clearly retained an essential curiosity about the world and how it operates. I'm looking forward to reading your assignment about VLEs and PLEs. Your analysis from a pedagogic perspective should prove a great complement to anything you might be doing from a technological one.

   Christine Sinclair on Friday, 02 December 2011, 13:38 UTC

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Blog post: 03 December 2011

Finally, We Meet

An amusing aspect of the IDEL11 course is that we have worked rogether for nearly three months and never really seen anything other than tiny icons of one another. So it was nice to finish up by finally "meeting" all my classmates and tutors "face-to-face" as it were in Adobe Connect...

Pictures provided courtesy of Rory Ewins.

Keywords:

2 Comments (+/-)

1. Although these meetings gave us more information about each other, there were some different responses to the experience to your own. Some reported finding it weird and troublesome - especially because of stilted conversations. This would inevitably disappear over time, with growing comfort with the medium (as you observed yourself) but while it is still at the "uncanny" phase for some, is there anything we can say about presence? I agree with your assessments about amusing and nice – I have a similar reaction – but why should that be? Does the amusement come because it is against the natural order of things to meet people through asynchronous then synchronous writing, tweeting, avatars... and finally, talking heads? I found meeting fellow graduands and tutors in the flesh both amusing and fascinating - and yes still slightly disturbing as more adjustments ensued.

   I wondered in particular what you are now thinking about voice. I can't remember who it was that struggled with Frank's morphed voice in SL, but that – combined with Anabel's response to "hearing" voices on the discussion board after the Connect session – has certainly started me questioning some of my assumptions and responses again! I see this tendency to stimulate questions as one of the strengths of this course. I think you mentioned voice earlier in your blog; I'll remind myself later!

   Christine Sinclair on Tuesday, 06 December 2011, 13:20 UTC

2. On presence, I was pleased to see that Adobe Connect had the typing ahead indication for those in typing mode... as that is a feature I feel helps a LOT with text chat. Its been available in Second Life for some time as you know. It really helps in maintaining thread awareness and waiting your turn when multiple conversations are being merged into a single linear thread of incoming messages.

   It was me who got thrown by Frank Lassard's morphed avatar voice due to my real world knowledge and hence assumptions. So I associated the voice with another avatar as it was such as strong assumption, which overrode the fact that there were clear Second Life viewer interface presence indications (green bars) and voice widget icons for who was actually speaking.

   My previous blog entry for this was my Week 10 summary at http://atate.org/mscel/archive/hp-blog-2011.html

Austin Tate on Tuesday, 06 December 2011, 13:28 UTC

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