

Realms of Possibility: Understanding the Role of Multiuser Virtual Environments in Foreign Language Curricula

Julie M. Sykes

Various features of multiuser virtual environments (MUVES) make them promising and, potentially transformational, contexts for the development of second language (L2) skills that are traditionally inaccessible in the foreign language classroom (Belz, 2005; García-Carbonell, et. al. 2001; Gee, 2003; Sykes, 2008; Thorne, 2008, Thorne, Black, Sykes, 2009). While there has been a surge in interest in the use of MUVES for language learning, there is still a relatively small body of empirical evidence that supports our understanding of how these immersive spaces can best be utilized for second language education. Unlike Internet use in L2 education in earlier times, when the Internet was typically perceived as a proxy or practice environment for the development of conventional L2 learning objectives (i.e., face-to-face communication and non-digital writing), Internet-mediated communication is now a high-stakes environment that pervades work, education, interpersonal communication and, not least, intimate relationship building and maintenance.

This presentation will explore the use of multiuser virtual environments for language learning. First, it will present the chief affordances of MUVES that make them especially relevant for language learning – (1) Engagement, (2) Skills and strategies, (3) Co-construction of learning, and (4) Comprehensive feedback and assessment. In doing so, it will also provide hands-on experience with *Croquelandia*, the first MUE designed for the learning of Spanish pragmatics, and *Mentira*, the first place-based, augmented reality mobile game for learning Spanish. These projects are unique not only because of the products produced (i.e., learning tool and empirical evaluation), but also due to the long-term partnership of the technical and research design team dedicated to creating an easily adaptable space that can be used in other educational contexts.



Croquelandia – The Plaza



Croquelandia – Interactive Features



Croquelandia – Avatar Interaction

iPod 2:18 PM

Cancel **Taquería Doña Carlota**



Este lugar es muy rústico, pero hay mucha vida. Hay un hombre viejo y raro sentado en el bar, parece que te reconoce. ¿Qué haces?

Decides irte y sales para afuera. >

Pides unos tacos y una bebida y te sientas en una mesa. >

Decides acercarte al hombre y hablar con él. >

Mentira – La taquería

iPod 2:23 PM

Cancel **Granja Jaramillo NC1**



Se siente la naturaleza entre las matas de maíz, las calabazas y los chiles. El zumbido de las abejas, las canciones de los pájaros, y el ritmo del agua en la acequia crean un sonido que calma a las personas. En medio del terreno, un lote de 3 acres, está Alejandro Silva, sentado en la Cerca al borde del parcela de tierra. El hombre se quita su sombrero y parece que

Mentira – La granja