Real Kids in a Virtual World

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As an educator who has been utilizing virtual worlds as a tool for undergraduate and graduate education for the past five years, I was excited to have the opportunity to create a virtual world where teachers could bring their K-12 students for learning activities. In the fall of 2012 I introduced this virtual world to children aged 6-13. After this, a classroom teacher brought her 5th and 6th grade students “inworld” to Bio-se Biome, an OpenSim-based educational virtual world. This world consists of four areas based on Earth Systems Science which include Biome, Hydrosphere, Atmosphere and Geosphere. A fifth island is dedicated to Native American Studies. This has been quite an adventure and this presentation will share some of the tips, successes and difficulties I experienced. I believe there is great potential in using virtual worlds with younger children that has not yet been realized. By sharing my experience I hope to encourage others to investigate the possibility of utilizing virtual worlds for K-12 education.

Included in this presentation will be tips about:

- Teacher strategies that facilitated a smooth introduction to the students
- Gaining administrator, district, school and parental permission
- Protecting the children
- Facilitating the learning curve for younger students,
- Managing the classroom and virtual presence of the K-12 students,
- Teaching methods and strategies that worked (and those that did not),

As well as a brief summary of:

- Student engagement with the learning activities,
- Student attitude with the technology
- Student attitude with learning about using the technology
- The teachers’ evaluation of the content learned by the experience.
- How this tool can be used to facilitate learning in younger students
- An invitation and written instructions on how to visit and bring in K-adult students into this virtual world and the other Bio-se educational areas

Objectives for the participants are:

- See how a 3D virtual world created for K-adult education looks
- Learn from the presenter’s experience how they might introduce virtual world learning to younger students.
- Identify and hopefully avoid obstacles the presenter and her graduate student encountered.
• Be willing to later take a 3D virtual trip into this exciting technology.
• Consider bringing some children into this virtual world and observe their experience.