Teaching with Avatars: Video Tutorials for Online Learning and Digital Literacy

The use of video tutorials for online learning is gaining increased attention and acceptance from educators, researchers, parents, and product developers. As elearning takes advantage of emerging digital media, students will increasingly experience instruction through online video tutorials, both at home and school (e.g., Khan Academy, Lynda.com, YouTube). There are few guidelines, however, to ensure that online video tutorials are engaging, informative, and educationally valuable. As part of the University of Oregon’s Project ESTRELLAS, we created 44 video tutorials using avatars as teachers and students. The tutorials are embedded in a curriculum of six modules for teaching middle school students to use digital tools and strategies for effective learning online. This presentation will focus on the rationale underlying use of avatars for video tutorials, and evidence-based principles for explicit instruction, accessibility, virtual presence, and aesthetics. Also shared are results from using the videos to improve vocabulary knowledge and text comprehension.