Simulations have been shown to be an effective method of introducing novice professionals to complicated and high-risk experiences (Ward, Williams, & Hancock, 2006). In simulations, the participants’ behaviors mirror “real-world” actions, but the natural contingencies of those actions are removed. This scaffolding procedure allows trainees to gain the experience needed to succeed in real world applications while minimizing the potential risks. For the growing number of students in rural areas who receive their teacher training via distance education programs, the opportunity to simulate educational practices in a live, face-to-face context is absent. A multi-user virtual environment (MUVE), such as Second Life (Second Life; http://secondlife.com) or the Opensimulator 3D Application Server (OpenSim; http://opensimulator.org/), offers the ability to conduct such simulations with participants who are located in rural or remote areas and who are unable to engage in place-based activities. Specifically, simulations within a MUVE afford the psychological sense of presence, defined as
the feeling of being in a virtual environment while being physically situated in another location (Insko, 2003).

This presentation will describe the development, implementation, and evaluation of a virtual environment called TeacherSim. The specific objectives of this presentation will be to:

1. describe our initial experiences in SecondLife,
2. describe the reasons for our migration from SecondLife to ScienceSim,
3. describe the development of TeacherSim in Open Simulator,
4. demonstrate several distance education teacher training activities in TeacherSim,
5. present evaluation data from TeacherSim studies, e.g., Mason, Blair, Jeon, & Glomb (2010), and
6. engage presentation participants in a discussion of experiences with teacher training in virtual environments and lessons learned.
References

