Abstract

In the world language learning environment, research points to the importance of high-quality encounters with the language and culture as promoting linguistic and cultural competence (Kinginger, 2008). However, often inside the classroom, students’ contact with the target language and culture is limited. The use of virtual reality, though, provides an avenue for these types of high-quality encounters due to its ability to transport learners to another place and time (Godwin-Jones, 2004). Considering the possibilities of virtual reality, then, this presentation seeks to answer the question surrounding what learners’ opinions of virtual reality are in an advanced-level Spanish course, specifically, as related to the usefulness of virtual reality in providing high-quality encounters with the target language and culture. Using the online platform Seekbeak, participants (n=41) worked in groups to develop virtual tours of Medellin, Colombia, that demonstrated their content knowledge related to narcofútbol (the involvement of drug money in Colombian soccer).

Introduction & Literature Review

Need for study

The amount of contact with the target language and culture in the classroom setting is limited, but research shows high-quality encounters promote linguistic and cultural growth.

Considering the possibilities of virtual reality, then:

Research Question

What are learners’ opinions of virtual reality in regards to providing high-quality encounters with the target language and culture?

Previous research focuses on VR use in FL education to:

- View Parisian quarters (Mills, 2017)
- Explore Gothic architecture (Miguel-Pueyo, 2016)

But there has been little to no focus on student-created virtual reality that promotes high-quality encounters with the language and culture.

The present study

5 week content-based project with culminating VR tour

The effects of narcofútbol in past, present, future Medellin, Colombia

Documentary Los dos Escobar as a content source

Methodology

- Pre- and post-project questionnaires
- Open-ended reflection
- Charmaz’ (2006) Constructivist Grounded Theory
- Advanced Spanish grammar course
- Focus on grammatical structures in context

Table 1 – Participant demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>#</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd year</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th year</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th year</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 41

Results

Based on your prior knowledge, list and describe what you know about virtual reality in a foreign language class.

Student Virtual Reality Knowledge

- No Knowledge
- Basic Knowledge
- Complete Knowledge

Expressed Virtual Reality Opinion

- Language Connection
- Complete Educational Hindrance

Conclusions

Multi-layered understanding of applicability of VR

- Found pedagogical focus of project to be useful and applicable to learning
- Language in real-world context
- Intent versus impact
- Intent of project was meaningful
- High-quality encounters are possible but...
- Impact was not practical
  - Steep learning curve in VR
  - Lack of literacy with technology platform

Students lack digital literacy

- Current assumption is that students have digital literacy
- Research shows educators should not make such assumptions
  - Problematic because it projects understanding and ability on students they might not actually have
- Despite lack of digital literacy, students still found VR to be an interesting and good pedagogical tool

References


Acknowledgements

This project was a part of the Wisconsin Teaching Fellows and Scholars (WTFS) program and was also funded by a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) grant from the Center for Advancing Teaching and Learning (CATL).

This project was conducted in and supported by the College of Liberal Studies, Department of Global Cultures and Languages, and the Language Resource Center at UWL.