October 29, 2013

Kimberly Olivares

Editor-in-Chief

JoTLT

Dear Dr. Olivares,

Thank you for your comments and suggestions in your Editorial Decision for MS #3956-12738. This letter delineates where changes have been made in the manuscript based on the reviewers’ recommendations. We appreciate your comments and believe your suggestions have helped us write a more focused manuscript.

Sincerely,

Kevin Oh

---------------------------------------Cover Letter Recommendations--------------------------

Reviewer B:

1. The paper is a bit long and could be shortened by moving some of the assessment tools to supplemental materials, for example.

We have moved Table I (Overview of 11 virtual worlds teacher training workshop steps) to Appendix 1 (page 31) and Table 4 (Lesson Plan developed by special education teachers) to Appendix 2 (page 32) but we would prefer to keep the remaining tables embedded in the text for increased reading ease. We would like to retain the detailed description of the steps starting on page 8 because a full account of the procedures will both help interested educators and researchers to replicate the study, thereby strengthening the study’s reliability.

Reviewer C:

2. The rationale and hypothesis were clear, but I wonder about the timeliness of investigating 3D IVWs. Given the decline in popularity of SL, there is a chance that while the authors present a very clear and convincing vision for the use of SL and other IVW for special education, tools like SL can become niche technologies and the learning curve for outsiders (due to their lack of circulation) may increase.  Therefore, I would be curious about also questioning prior knowledge and skills related to SL (for users – students or teachers), and how this may affect the results.

The increasing number of schools with a presence in SL as well as the continuing publication of research done in Second Life leads us to believe that SL continues to be quite popular. Its features, such as interactivity, voice and text communication, and immersiveness help to generalize the results of the study to similar virtual worlds, such as Active Worlds, which also provides a platform for numerous educational activities.

Since SL is still new to most educators, it makes sense that prior knowledge and skills related to SL would be low. On page 7, we have added the citations of four studies where the participating teachers were also inexperienced in the use of virtual worlds, to demonstrate that this is currently the rule. The participants’ inexperience in SL is also one of the reasons why we are arguing that our teachers need hands-on inquiry-based experience with SL. Prior knowledge is likely to change since colleges of education have recently begun to offer virtual worlds teacher training. To address how higher prior SL knowledge may affect the results, we are currently conducting a new study where the participants, special education teachers, begin a virtual worlds teacher training workshop WITH prior SL experience. Results will be available next summer.

3. Findings were presented from the various data sources, but the presentation of the results that are more quantitative seemed to be a little too brief.

We have added Table 2 on page 13 displaying the means, standard deviations and the significance levels (please note that all pre-survey items are displayed in Table 2).

4. I had few questions on or issues with the discussion and conclusion, other than you may want to avoid the sense that the limitations section is overly limiting the strength of the study.

While we did not shorten the limitation section on page 28, we rephrased the limitations in a way that allows the reader to see that the small sample size is adequate compared with similar studies (we cite 11 studies). We also highlight the similarities of Second Life with other virtual worlds to explain that the results can be generalized to other virtual worlds.

5. I did have minor difficulty determining who was doing the learning at times and the roles of those being discussed. The transitions between discussing the graduate students and K-12 special education students might have been a bit clearer in terms of how they are labeled to avoid confusion.

We have harmonized the use of “special education teachers” (i.e., the participants) across the article and have eliminated the use of “students” where we thought it might have led to confusion.