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EDU625 Unit 6 Virtual Experience

For Unit 6's Learning Challenge, I tried exploring several online virtual environments.

My Discussion Post:

I felt like I was going in circles with this assignment. I tackled this over several days.

- First, I created an avatar using Dr. Bless' readyplayer.me link. This part felt fun. I named my avatar "Poppy" and downloaded the .png file (see left below). In contrast, I was put off by all the extravagant, punk, space-age, and dark-spirited avatars that Second Life offered (see right below).



Avatar I made from readyplayer.me



Avatars offered in Second Life ☹️

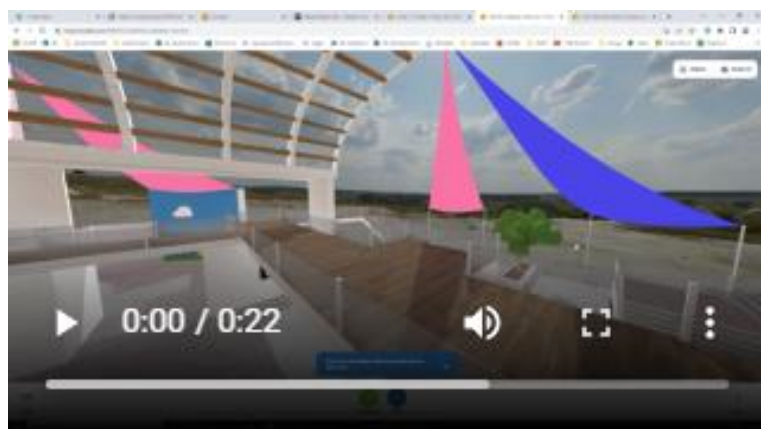
- At this point, I wasn't sure what to DO with my avatar, so I looked for a virtual environment. I was turned off by **Second Life** after watching one of our assignment videos, but there's so much talk about it, so I was willing to check it out. However, while it looks like you can join for free (my requirement), I'd need to download it, and I'm not willing to do this because I don't want leftover crumbs from the program remaining on my computer when I delete it. I read that Second Life is now recently available on mobile devices, but it appeared that I'd need a subscription for this feature.
- So, I searched my Apple Store and found **Sims Freeplay** (screenshot below), which I downloaded (for free) to my iPhone. The first thing it asked me was to "buy a shower" for my bathroom. Somehow, I unknowingly touched the right areas that placed a shower ... in my front yard. I couldn't for the life of me move it into the house. I lasted only a few minutes before (1) losing interest, (2) getting frustrated at not knowing what to do, and (3) becoming annoyed at the circus-like background music. I tried it on two different days, and both times I didn't know how to exit the app. I was swiping up, down, and all around. Thumbs down.



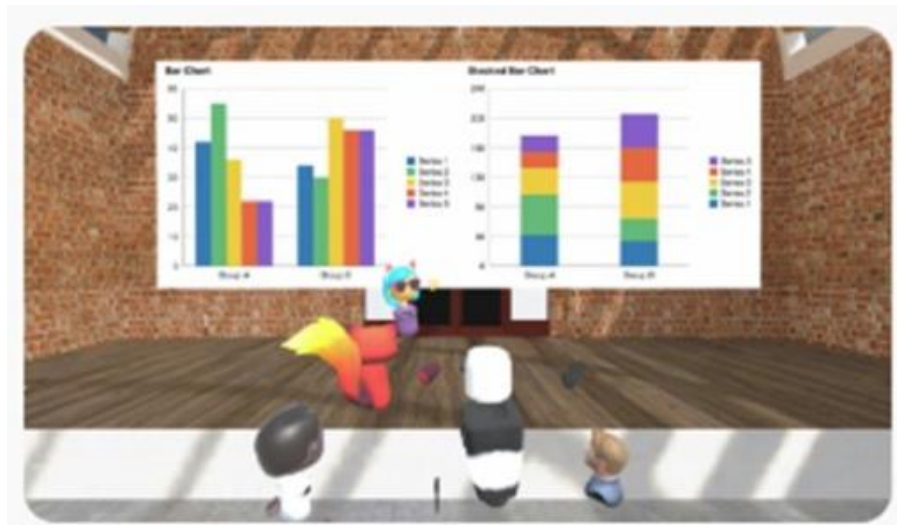
Sims Freeplay screenshot

- The instructions for this assignment gave the example of using **ISTE Island**, but I couldn't find it or figure out what this is.
- At this point, I searched the internet using all kinds of phrases like “virtual environments,” “virtual worlds,” “easy-to-use virtual avatar environments,” etc. Eventually, I stumbled on **Mozilla Hubs**. The images were all cartoons and childlike, but it claimed its app could create private virtual meeting spaces where you can communicate, collaborate, and share media. I thought this would be the closest find that might work in a learning setting (because one could “conduct a class” in one of the virtual rooms). It prompted me to download the app, but fortunately, it also offered me an instant, on-the-spot “Create Room” option. I didn't see where I could create an avatar (or import the one I'd already made). However, I liked this more than anything else I'd seen so far – because it was simple and seemingly functional for a meeting space (if others were present, too).

I took a quick video as I moved around the screen to show what it looks like:



Also, this is an image from Mozilla's website illustrating what a virtual classroom could look like:



- I didn't want to give up on the avatar I created, so I went back to readyplayer.me. I found a page that offered different play worlds, and it seemed like it would have allowed me to connect my avatar ... but again, it looked like it wanted to download something, so I nixed the idea.

Alas, while I did not get far experiential-wise, to answer the question of how I might use virtual technologies to enhance a learning activity, I would look into using Mozilla Hubs' virtual meeting spaces. I see it taking a lot of work, though, to learn not only from an administrator perspective but as a support role, too, to help others "join" and use the virtual meeting space. For example, I'd have to create training instructions and host a visual demonstration for my colleagues if I were to try and use this for actual meetings (although, the cartoon vibe would not fare well with our corporate environment).

My resulting impression of this experience is that for virtual learning experiences to be successful, they should be **easy to understand** – and right away (or you risk losing interest). Also, it would be great if there were some standardization like Microsoft apps have with their toolbars. I consider myself a quick learner who is not afraid to push buttons around technology and figure things out ... but of all the technology I've ever seen, these virtual "game" worlds feel like nonsense to me and something only a niche audience would enjoy.