

Review of 3D Game Lab

Background

3D Game Lab was presented to me by Dr. Patricia Donahue in ITEC 830 this semester. It is a quest-based learning platform created by professors of instructional technology at Boise State University, it is currently in closed beta testing.

Instructional Approach

As a non-gamer, it took me a while to figure out what the folks at 3D game lab were going for. I didn't quite understand what "quest based" meant, nor did I understand how it could be called a game. This all changed when I did a little research on gaming, and learned more about games like World of Warcraft. After learning a bit more about online games, the term "quest" made much more sense, and so did 3D Game Lab. I would classify this site as a learning environment which follows an exploratory model (Bannan-Ritland & Dabbagh, 2005).

3D Game Lab itself is a tool that can be used by teachers to create instruction. The quality of the instruction depends on the instructor. Instructors create "quests" for students to complete which require various tasks to be completed by the student. In order to move to the next level, students must complete a series of quests. For example, in order to create my own quests, I have to complete a series of quests created by Dr. Donahue. A quest is usually text, video, links, and an assignment. The quests vary in complexity from watching a video and leaving a comment, to collecting information from multiple sources and applying your knowledge in some way. Follow this [link](#) for an overview of 3D Game Lab.

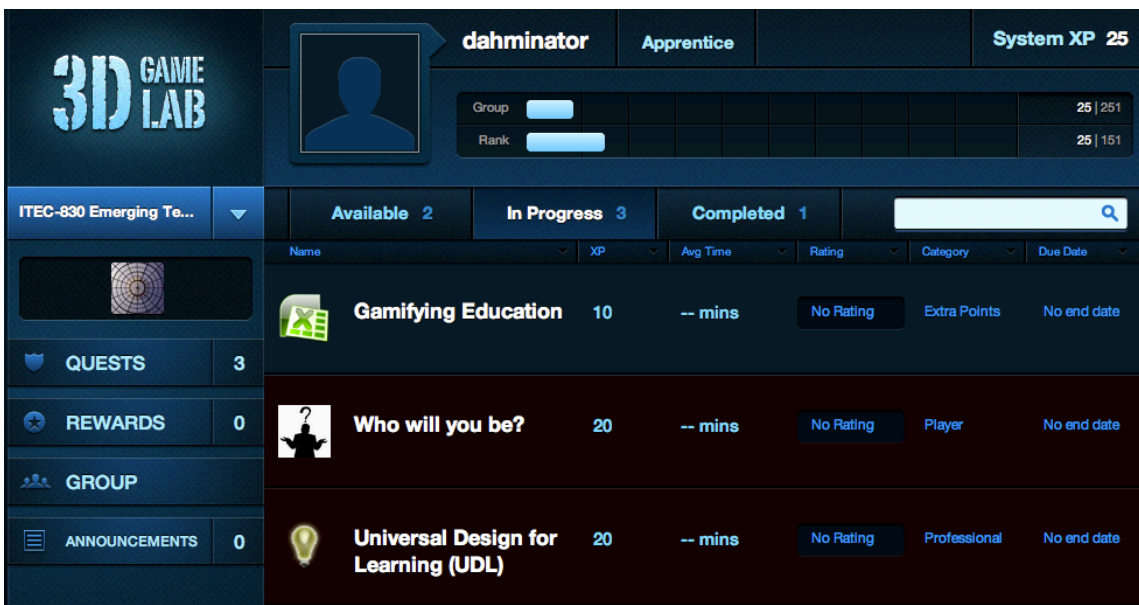


Figure 1.

3D Game Lab user interface

3D GAME LAB

dahminator Apprentice **System XP 25**

Group: [Progress Bar] 25 | 251
Rank: [Progress Bar] 25 | 151

ITEC-830 Emerging Te... ▼

QUESTS 3

REWARDS 0

GROUP

ANNOUNCEMENTS 0

Your Mission

- Review these resources to get an understanding of UDL concepts.
 - Wikipedia - UDL: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_Design_for_Learning
 - National Center on UDL: <http://www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl/udlguidelines>
 - CAST: About UDL: <http://www.cast.org/udl/index.html>
- Choose one of these tasks, happy searching!!
 - Share a URL to an example of strong use of UDL, explain why you believe it embodies the principles of good design for learning. Will you use a similar strategy in designing your quests?OR
 - Share a URL of a poor example of UDL. What suggestions do you have to improve it to meet UDL principles? Be specific.

Figure 2. Sample Quest

As I complete the quests, I have found the instruction to be effective. My biggest worry with game-based instruction is that students can play passively and not really apply what they have learned. The quests in 3D Game Lab are not games in the sense that there is a story and a plot, and a clear end point. The Game aspect comes from the way the instruction is delivered, as “quests” as opposed to “modules” with rewards and goals in place for motivation. What makes this effective is that quests are dependent on each other, you cannot access more advanced quests without completing the prerequisite lessons. This type of learning can be hugely effective for young students in particular (as opposed to adult learners) due to the engagement factor. My greatest concern with using distance education at the primary level is the lack of self efficacy of my students, delivering the instruction as a game could really help get over that hurdle. From the learner’s perspective, I really appreciate the way the instruction is set up so that I can explore many sources to come to my conclusions. There are links provided to get you started, but there is a lot of room for self-directed exploration. This is a huge benefit when it comes to differentiation.

Students can find out the information they need in a variety of different ways depending on their learning style, and they can present their learning in different ways, depending on how the quest is set up.

Interactivity

The level of interactivity depends on how the quest was created by the instructor. In the case of the quest that I completed, I had to watch a video and explore several websites to answer the questions posed by the instructor. 3D Game Lab also contains a social component, my fellow 830 classmates are all a part of a group where we can share our experiences and discuss our learning. This aspect adds to the site's interactivity.

The interactivity of the site is somewhat limited. Learners can earn badges and achievement points for completing tasks, but the tasks can be as simple as reading text and posting a response. I think as an LMS, this is a step up from something like iLearn, but still not incredibly interactive. The potential for interactivity is great, as the platform becomes more robust, it will enable instructors to create more choices and interactivity for users. At this point, the instruction is mostly glorified web-quests (which can still be quite effective).

Navigation and User Experience

The navigation begins on the "guild site" (Figure 3) this is an interface for instructors, not meant to be seen by students (as far as I can tell). The design is a bit dated, but it is in beta. The navigation on this page is very simple and straightforward. It is set up like a blog, user comments are the first thing you see. Users are prompted to log in and are led to their quest pages (see Figure 1). Each quest results in a different user experience, the one I selected had clear directions prompting me to watch a video, and a button prompting me to "complete task" when I finished. Upon clicking the button, I was provided with a comment field in which I was prompted to answer a question about the video. This was clearly marked and easy to follow. It was also nice to see how much time it took each person on average to complete each quest, and how many points it was worth, since I am earning achievement badges. On the quest page, it is also clearly labeled which quests I need to complete, which are in progress, and which are completed. From a learner's perspective, this helps me to organize my time. It is also nice that I can begin a task, and save it to work on later without losing my place. Each quest also has a due date associated with it, which is important for instructors using this in a classroom setting.

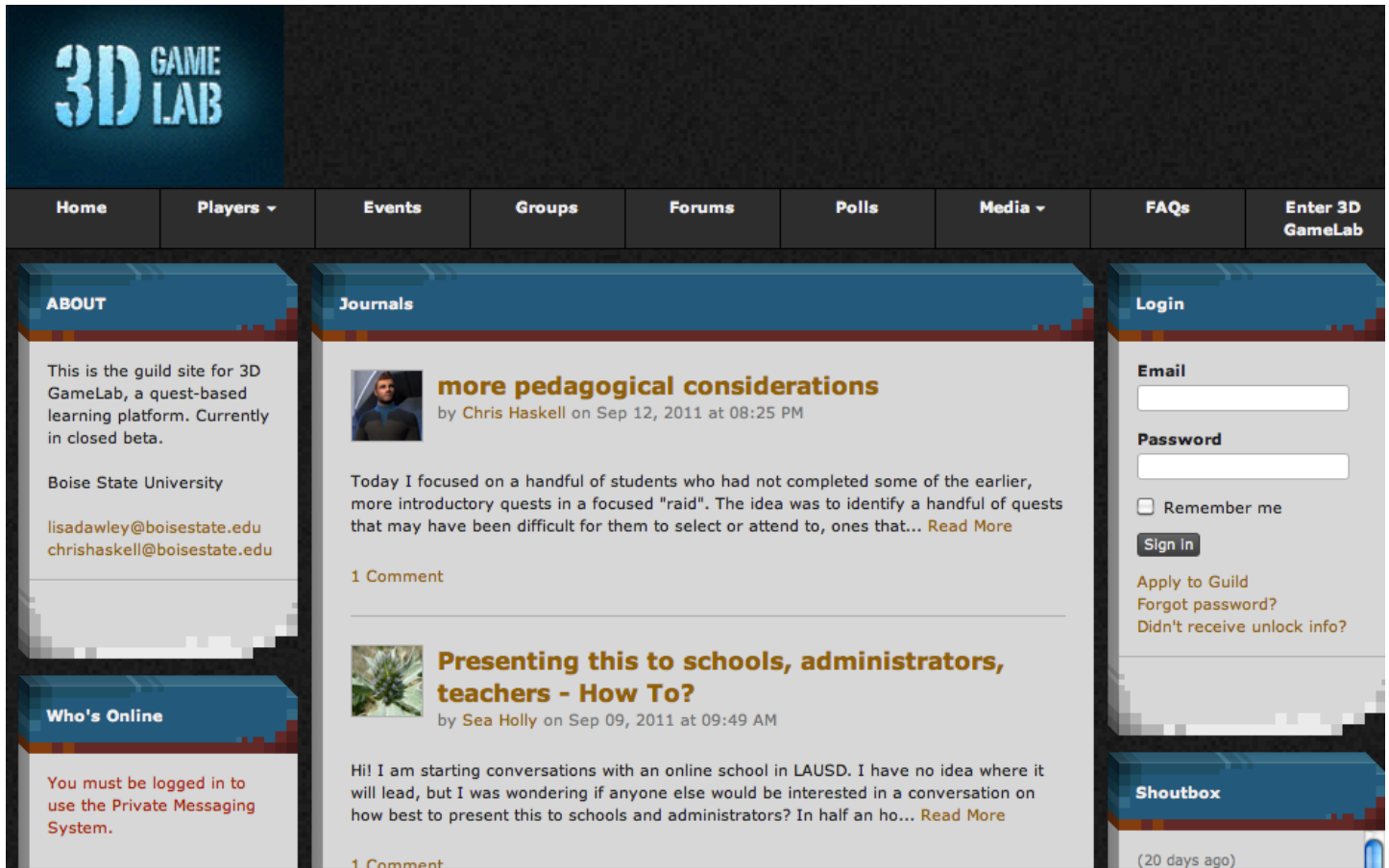


Figure 3. 3D Game Lab Guild Site

Administrative Factors

This is where 3D Game lab falls short. It is still in beta testing, and not open to the public, so it is not a viable LMS yet. In order for Dr. Donahue to be able to use it, she had to go through quite a bit of training, which can also be prohibitive. It is free to use at this point, but only if you have an invitation. I imagine when they are out of beta testing, it will be a paid service. The nice thing about 3D Game Lab is that it is so open and really allows instructors to be creative. This can be good or bad from the learner's perspective, depending on how well the instruction is designed. Everything from content, to course requirements are determined by the instructor.

Media Design

The media used in each quest varies. For the purpose of this review, I completed one quest in which I had to watch a video, and respond to a prompt afterwards. The video itself was well made (and thus well chosen by the instructor). It was a TED Talk, which are known for being well made and interesting. There were no other forms of media used in this particular quest, but it was simple, so I think that was the right decision. Too much information can confuse a learner.

Conclusions

3D Game Lab has a the potential to change the way distance education is delivered. As an LMS, it could be quite powerful and robust. As a student participating in distance learning, I think the engagement factor alone would make for a more rich learning experience. Even if the instruction is only text-based, the achievement tasks add to the learning experience. I would so much rather explore web-sites, and watch videos than read a text book. Taking these tasks and making a game out of them enrich the learning experience. From an instructor's perspective, the system is not yet robust enough to compete with ilearn, but I could see this type of platform taking over as the standard in distance education.