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What is machinima?

YOUNG people around the world are quickly discovering the latest craze in gaming technology - making your own movie using the characters and settings from video games. Known as machinima, a combination of the words machine and cinema, the art of filming short movies from computer or console games is quickly sweeping the globe and Queensland students have been quick to get on board. Pronounced muh-shin-eh-mah, machinima involves recording footage from PC or games consoles. The player-producer creates the story and edits shots together to form it. This costs a fraction of traditional filming, as there are no fees for pricey actors and other staff, no weather conditions causing delays and no film-set costs. Footage can be filmed from PC or console-based games, such as Xbox or Playstation. If using a console, a digital video converter such as Canopus ADVCS5 is needed. If taking shots from a PC game, free software such as Fraps (www.fraps.com) is available. Once obtained, the footage can be edited together using standard video-editing software such as Windows Movie Maker. Voice-over and music also can be added at the editing stage.

Education Queensland's Machinima Trial

AS PART of the Games in Learning Project, Education Queensland's ICT Learning Innovation Centre is working with three Queensland schools to research and develop activities based around using machinima in secondary school film, television and new media subjects. Teachers from Glenala State High School, Queensland Academy for Creative Industries and Trinity Bay State High School attended a three-day workshop at the ICT Learning Innovation Centre on the Sunshine Coast in March last year before the 18-month trial started. The schools were provided with a budget to buy the hardware and software needed for students to work on machinima films. Throughout the trial, which is due to end later this year, the teachers have regular teleconferences and workshops to share their knowledge and experiences. At the end of the trial, the teachers will have produced a Machinima Toolkit which will be available to all teachers across the state. Project co-ordinator Colleen Stieler says in most schools it is film study classes that use machinima, but as the technology becomes better known there is potential for it to be used in other subjects to create mini-movies or documentaries highlighting certain issues or subjects.

Nambour State High School anti-bullying machinima

NAMBOUR State High School has used machinima to discourage bullying in the school and will continue the program this year. ICT teacher Mark Piper asked his Year 9 ICT students to produce a one-minute anti-bullying music video suitable for their peers by capturing game play from consoles such as Xbox 360 and Sony Playstation. "I was familiar with implementing video-editing solutions in Years 9 and 10 but was keen to incorporate aspects of captured game play in the task," Mr Piper said. He said student engagement in the project was high and it got the students thinking and talking, not only about bullying and violence in video games but also copyright. The task emphasised the creative side of the activity rather than purely technical skills to produce a multimedia product with a "message". The students were keen to come in before school and during breaks to work on their group's solution. Collaboration and imagination were required to complete this task and the use of ICT supported the process with a defined product and audience. "The capabilities of the various games that they used allowed students to set up situations that would have been difficult or impossible to set up in real-life," he said. This year's Year 9 ICT elective students will also be asked to produce an anti-bullying video, with the best ones being shown in school assemblies. Mr Piper will present a workshop at the Get Game conference at the ICT Learning Innovation Centre on June 6.

Machinima-tastic



Queensland Academy for Creative Industries

AT THE Queensland Academy for Creative Industries (QACI), students are doing awesome work with machinima in Visual Arts and Film classes. Teachers Glenda Hobdell and John Carozza are taking part in the Education Queensland machinima trial and are beginning to extract the technology's full educational potential. Ms Hobdell's Year 10 Visual Arts students create self-portrait video montages using a range of techniques, including machinima. "I'm getting the students to use machinima more as a layering device, focusing on the visual arts side rather than more traditional filmmaking conventions. The students combine use of conventional video capture technologies such as video cams and mobile phones, with Flash animation and machinima footage layered into the final film," she said. "This way they produce conceptual video works that look less like copies of games. Outcomes include elements of layered machinima imagery, other captured or drawn footage and visual effects layered into their works to produce rich textures and deep contextual meaning. "It's a very exciting direction, especially as it is so connected and relevant to the students. They enjoy working with games as a new media art form. Games are a significant part of their everyday lives so there is instant motivation and engagement and high-order learning." In Mr Carozza's Year 11 Film class, students have worked on a transformation and metamorphosis unit. Ms Hobdell says machinima is used to illustrate mutation or change both physically and psychologically. "The students study human evolution as part of this project as well as concepts of homo sapiens versus techno sapiens. Machinima is perfect because they can use gaming images, enabling weaponry, science-fiction and sci-fi game characters to be juxtaposed with human video footage through the use of blue screen techniques. The results are inspiring."

Glenala State School

AT GLENALA State High School, head of arts Chris Hayward and her colleague Narelle Richards are teaching Machinima 101 and learning just as much as their students. Using PC and Xbox games, Glenala's Years 11 and 12 film, television and new media students are capturing machinima footage to create music and narrative videos. Last year was the first time machinima technology was used in the school, and Ms Hayward said she was learning along with the students and studying the best way to integrate it into the classroom. "We jumped at the chance to be part of Education Queensland's machinima trial," she said. "I was very interested to see how it would fit into our curriculum and how the students would take up the new technology." It appears machinima has been a hit at Glenala State High, with students enjoying their work - their only complaint being they wanted more time to work on their projects. "The main problem I've had is that students were frustrated with the lack of class time they had to work on their videos. By nature, machinima needs a certain time element to learn the game well, collect the footage and then edit it all together. I found the kids wanted more time to spend on their projects. "One of my biggest machinima achievements was working with a student from the Special Education Unit. "He became really engaged in the project, worked well and quickly grasped the concept." Ms Hayward said some of the students, particularly those who don't have computers or game consoles at home, had found the machinima unit to be a big learning curve. "They have to learn a number of elements. Firstly about game technology, then machinima as well as film editing. "It's been a lot of fun, though, and last year's students put together some great music videos."

Learn more:

- Australian Centre for the Moving Image, www.acmi.net.au
- Machinima, www.machinima.com
- Academy of Machinima Arts and Sciences, www.machinima.org
- Machinima Examples, www.dmu.ac.uk/machinima/what_is_machinima/machinima_examples.php
- Machinima UK, www.machinima.org.uk/
- Games in Learning, www.gamesinlearning.com
- Machinima Festival Europe 2007, www.dmu.ac.uk/machinima/
- Global Kids' Digital Media Initiative, www.holymeatballs.org

Get Games Games in Learning Conference

TEACHERS from across Queensland are invited to learn more about games in learning and machinima at the Get Game conference on June 6. The conference, at the ICT Learning Innovation Centre, will be packed with workshops about the latest in educational game research, along with state school teachers sharing what they're doing in their own schools. A full-day post-conference workshop on June 7 will focus solely on machinima. Students from the schools trialling machinima will speak about their experiences and learning. To register for the conference, visit www.gamesinlearning.com

Thanks to Colleen Stieler and Larissa Bilyard (Department of Education, Training and the Arts) www.gamesinlearning.com Colleen.Stieler@deta.qld.gov.au

Project officer Colleen Stieler

CO-ORDINATING the machinima trial is Games in Learning project officer Colleen Stieler. Six months into the role, Ms Stieler is responsible for gathering feedback and helping the teachers write the Machinima Toolkit. She also organises regular teleconferences between the trial participants. Previously, she was involved with the Girls and ICT project. "When I was teaching I noticed that few girls were enrolling in my Information and Communications Technology classes," she said. "Research shows us that girls have the same abilities as boys, but not as much hands-on experience so are therefore reluctant to join ICT classes." To encourage more female participation, Ms Stieler introduced the Techo G computer club exclusively for girls. "The club started changing girls' attitudes and we got more enrolments for ICT classes. "Because ICT has such a huge impact on our lives, the industry is calling out for females to add important diversity to the workforce," she said.



Education Queensland's Games in Learning Project

IT HAS been recognised for some time that games can hold an important place in learning. Interactive games engage students, helping them understand concepts and learn new information in an entertaining way. The machinima project is part of Education Queensland's Games in Learning project. Games give students the chance to challenge their imaginations and develop life-skills such as co-operation with others and understanding new concepts. Through their interactive nature, games also enable students to be actively engaged in the learning process, and even teach their peers. The project focuses on four areas. Game study includes examining the genre of games and their features, audiences, learning purposes and applications. Game making involves the design and software components, meta language, idea sharing and team building. Game play explores the learning and interaction elements, as well as simulations, modelling, experimenting and achieving goals. Game innovation involves exploring innovative ways that games and games-based technologies can be used for learning.

Global Kids

GLOBAL Kids, a US organisation committed to helping urban youth transform into successful students as well as global and community leaders, produced a machinima film in 2007 highlighting the plight of child soldiers in Uganda. A difficult and sensitive topic, the students extensively researched their storyline, using websites, reading biographies and even acquiring the help of UNICEF's communications chief in Uganda. At times the students had to revise key elements of the plot. Their research paid off, with experts on the issue agreeing the students got it right. A Child's War has now been seen by thousands of people around the world. It can be viewed on YouTube (www.youtube.com/watch?v=nK54WRUQJW4YouTube)

