Newsletter Issue 2

As researchers, we often encounter the need to combine data from multiple sources; and when those sources include different types of data, it can be challenging to examine findings in a meaningful way.

This newsletter highlights the way in which the Observational Research Lab has assisted one researcher in addressing this issue.

SPOTLIGHT PROJECT: Liz Boltz

Liz, a 3rd year EPET PhD student, is using her practicum to explore the ways in which historical empathy can be manifested through videogame play. The data collection in her project includes: (a) a background survey and pre-test; b) game play by participants, including player statements and game play data (recorded using screen capture software and video recording in the lab); and c) stimulated recall interviews, in which participants and researchers view and discuss portions of the game-play session; and d) a post-test.

For this study, she makes use of our observation room and media capture software, along with capture of game play. When she initially tried to use Screencast-O-Matic to capture both game play as it occurred and the webcam feed of her subjects, the software slowed down the game to a noticeable degree. As she notes, for subsequent sets of participants, "we used multiple camera angles within the ORL to capture the screen and the participants [and] this worked much better".

Liz then synchronizes the two video sources (recordings of participants and their gameplay) for qualitative coding through use of the Lab's Noldus Observer XT software. "No extra work was needed to make that happen," she notes. "Since my secondary research is focused on whether certain types of game play tend to elicit historical empathy more than others, I want to be able to code historical discourse in terms of the type of gameplay (e.g., cut scene, action sequence, etc.) that appeared to elicit it."

Our goal is to provide flexible solutions for collection, analysis, and reporting of observational data in a safe and ethical manner. This includes our capacity to simultaneously capture multiple angles of a situation at once. This allows researchers the chance to focus on properly capturing behaviors exhibited by the participants (their expressions, focus, etc.) and how they are connected to events in their surrounding environment - a critical component of qualitative research.

Our support for projects like these is currently available and will continue to be offered free of charge through Summer of 2017. We are excited about further collaboration with researchers in the College of Education, and anyone who is interested should contact us at orlab@msu.edu.

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This newsletter is aimed at informing MSU's College of Education faculty about the various operations in the Observation Research Lab, namely by providing basic information and highlighting "spotlight projects" currently being conducted while using our resources. It is our hope that through reading this newsletter, those who are interested will see the potential of using our lab for their studies and will want to involve us in their current or future research.