Immersive Education Initiative announces Education Grid and Platform Ecosystem at Boston Summit

BOSTON, MA – January 22, 2008 – During the 2008 Boston Digital Media Summit last week the Immersive Education Initiative announced the Education Grid and corresponding Platform Ecosystem. Based upon open source technologies and open standards, the Education Grid and Platform Ecosystem will provide educators with a comprehensive end-to-end infrastructure for a new generation of virtual world learning environments, interactive learning games, and simulations. The first three platforms in the ecosystem were introduced at the Summit: Second Life, Sun Microsystems Laboratory's Project Wonderland, and Croquet. These platforms will be enhanced to utilize the server-side Education Grid that will deliver a rich library of learning objects, digital media assets, learning games and services from which a wide variety of Immersive Education experiences can be assembled.

Immersive Education (ImmersiveEducation.org) combines interactive 3D graphics, commercial game and simulation technology, virtual reality, voice chat, Web cameras (webcams) and rich digital media with collaborative online course environments and classrooms. Immersive Education gives participants a sense of "being there" even when attending a class or training session in person is not possible, practical, or desirable, which in turn provides educators and students with the ability to connect and communicate in a way that greatly enhances the learning experience. Immersive Education is developed by the Immersive Education Initiative, a non-profit international collaboration of universities, colleges, research institutes, consortia and companies that are working together to define and develop open standards, best practices, platforms, and communities of support for virtual worlds and game-based learning and training systems.

Approximately 200 people attended the two-day Boston Summit held January 12th and 13th. The Summit was focused entirely on Immersive Education and was sponsored by the Grid Institute, Woods College of Advancing Studies at Boston College, and Federation of American Scientists (FAS) with the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation. Educators, researchers, administrators and students from Boston College, Boston Public Schools, Amherst College, Federation of American Scientists, MIT Media Lab, Harvard University, Duke University, United States Department of Education, New Media Consortium (NMC), Johnson & Wales University, NASA, Sun Microsystems, Synthespian Studios, and Computerworld gave a series of presentations, panel discussions and workshops that provided Summit attendees with an in-depth overview of Immersive Education. Immersive Education Day at Harvard University was a precursor to the 2008 Boston Digital Media Summit.

Explicit outcomes of the Summit include plans to design and develop the Education Grid; integration of Second Life, Wonderland, and Croquet with the Education Grid; research into new forms of pedagogy and assessment for Immersive Education; development of Immersive Education curricula; and a nation-wide pilot program for K-12 schools and higher education.

James A. Woods, S.J, Dean of the Woods College of Advancing Studies at Boston College, and host of the Summit, captured the spirit of the event by observing that “it is always exciting to be on the forefront of discovery; of seeing a vision, long germinating, dynamically taking form, now breaking through.” This sentiment was shared by participants and attendees alike.

“The 2008 Boston Digital Media Summit was a watershed event for Immersive Education,” said Aaron E. Walsh, Director of the Grid Institute. “The previous two generations of Immersive Education were based on specific client-side platforms tied to proprietary server-side infrastructures. The future of Immersive Education revolves around multiple platforms working in unison through the open Education Grid that is built by educators for educators.”
"The extraordinary power of these new technologies can only be used to achieve revolutionary gains in education if educational institutions are willing to embrace approaches to management that encourage collaboration and continuous improvement. It isn't a question of whether these tools will be used in education -- they clearly will be. It's a question of whether they will be used wisely," noted Henry Kelly, President of the Federation of American Scientists (FAS).

"If Immersive Education is creating a new paradigm around the ways we view teaching and learning, it is also creating a new paradigm around the ways we assess and evaluate teaching and learning. At every level, the research is engaging and exciting" stated John Carfora, Director of Sponsored Research at Amherst College and co-Chair of the Immersive Education Initiative.

"The dialog at the Immersive Education Summit was rich and engaging, representing the perspectives of a wide section of the people working in virtual worlds. Clearly this is a group with their finger on the pulse of open source directions and development in this arena," observed Larry Johnson, CEO of the New Media Consortium (NMC).

"We're extremely pleased that Croquet has been selected as an Immersive Education platform. This is a wonderful validation of Croquet's open source, open standards and open access approach to building robust, flexible and infinitely expandable immersive learning and research environments," remarked Julian Lombardi, Assistant Vice President of Academic Services and Technology Support at Duke University and Chairman of the Croquet Consortium Board of Directors.

"As creator of the open source Project Wonderland and Project Darkstar technologies, Sun is delighted with their adoption by the Media Grid's Immersive Education Initiative. As a member of the Advisory committee we can together advance the cause and implementation of open source, open standards and open content in the creation of safe, secure and private virtual worlds for teaching, learning and academic business collaboration around the world," said Kevin Roebuck, Sun Microsystems' Community Manager for Immersive Technologies, Global Education and Research.

During the Summit Sun Microsystems announced it will provide grants to K-12 schools and universities participating in the 2008 Immersive Education pilot program. Sun Microsystems announced a $25,000 Series of Technology Grants for K-12, Community College and Higher Education Institutions in support of Wonderland Development. Proposals will be accepted in a variety of interest areas ranging from Core Platform, Inter-operability, Content and Curriculum and Pilot Deployments. Details on the program will soon be provided on Sun's Immersion Special Interest Group Community site (http://sun-isig.org/) and ImmersiveEducation.org.

About Immersive Education
Immersive Education (ImmersiveEducation.org) combines interactive 3D graphics, commercial game and simulation technology, virtual reality, voice chat (Voice over IP/VoIP), Web cameras (webcams) and rich digital media with collaborative online course environments and classrooms. Immersive Education gives participants a sense of "being there" even when attending a class or training session in person isn't possible, practical, or desirable, which in turn provides educators and students with the ability to connect and communicate in a way that greatly enhances the learning experience. Unlike traditional computer-based learning systems, Immersive Education is designed to immerse and engage students in the same way that today's best video games grab and keep the attention of players. Immersive Education supports self-directed learning as well as collaborative group-based learning environments that can be delivered over the Internet or using fixed-media such as CD-ROM and DVD. Shorter mini-games and interactive lessons can be injected into larger bodies of course material to further heighten and enrich the Immersive Education experience.
About the Media Grid

The Media Grid is a public utility for digital media. Based on new and emerging distributed computational grid technologies, the Media Grid builds upon existing Internet and Web standards to create a unique network optimized for digital media delivery, storage, and processing. As an on-demand public computing utility, a range of software programs and Web sites can use the Media Grid for delivery and storage of rich media content, media processing, and computing power. The Media Grid is an open and extensible platform that enables a wide range of applications not possible with the traditional Internet alone, including: Massive Media on Demand (MMoD); Interactive digital cinema on demand; Immersive Education and distance learning; Truly immersive multiplayer games and Virtual Reality (VR); Hollywood movie and film rendering, special effects, and composition; Real-time rendering of high resolution graphics; Real-time visualization of complex weather patterns; Real-time protein modeling and drug design; Telepresence, telemedicine, and telesurgery; Vehicle and aircraft design and simulation; Visualization of scientific and medical data.

The Grid Institute leads the design and development of the global Media Grid through the MediaGrid.org open standards organization in collaboration with industry, academia, and governments from around the world.

To learn more about the Media Grid and Immersive Education visit MediaGrid.org and ImmersiveEducation.org