**PEDAGOGICAL AGENTS**

Studying can be very boring and lonely in the virtual realm. Staring at page after page of plain text for one or two hours – or even longer! – can be disappointing. Humans need interaction, contact and stimuli, especially when learning. Pedagogical agents can help “liven up” an online learning session.

What is a Pedagogical Agent?

Clark & Mayer (2008) describe pedagogical agents as, “on-screen characters who help guide the learning process during an e-learning episode. Agents can be represented visually as cartoon-like characters, as talking-head video, or as virtual reality avatars; they can be represented verbally through machine-simulated voice, human recorded voice, or printed text. Agents can be representations of real people using video and human voice or artificial characters using animation and computer-generated voice” (pg. 191).

Expo The Expert is a pedagogical agent that is aiding students in a mock-class called Grounds Keeping 101. The students are actually employees at a resort on Baderman Island; it is home to a botanical garden where several endangered butterflies make their home. Employees in the botanical garden are required to learn about butterflies, their habitat and host-plants. While many of the courses in Grounds Keeping 101 are given in a traditional classroom setting, there are several online instructional modules focusing on butterfly and host-plant identification.

“Hey there! I’m Expo The Expert, and I’m going to help you learn all about butterflies that make their home on Baderman Island. Do you know what a habitat is? How about a host-plant? Did you know that butterflies don’t have just two eyes but over a dozen? This is going to be a fun and exciting course that will prepare you to work in the botanical gardens here on Baderman Island!

Expo will guide them through the worked examples, diagrams and charts. While While there are instructors that are reluctant to use pedagogical agents st studies are showing that their presence can improve learning. Pedagogical Pedagogical agents do not have to be human but it does help if they have have human characteristics and human gestures (Clark & Mayer,2008) .