avalon

Access to Virtual and Action Learning live ONline

Education and Culture DE
Lifelong Learning Programme

Italian for Beginners "Alzati e cammina!"

Table of Contents
(Either click on the section you are interested in or read the whole document from beginning to end)

Background to the Course Concept

This course scenario is based on a course for beginners we ran under the Avalon project which was specifically designed to introduce language teachers to virtual worlds as a learning platform for language education. The course developed an extension of a face-to-face introductory course of Italian for teachers. The virtual world course was designed around the learners' need to practice the target language and to familiarize themselves with some of the basic features of the environment. It was also used as an opportunity for the group to stay in touch and continue to learn together after the end of their face-to-face course.

When we first conceived of a course for beginners, our aim was to explore a course model which at the time was innovative for virtual world language education. The three main challenges we set ourselves were to create a course where:

1) all course content would be delivered in the virtual world only and we would not rely on external LMS as most courses in virtual worlds were doing at the time;

2) our target learners would be beginners in the target language and not at the intermediate level as most courses were in virtual worlds at the time;

3) the target language would be a language other than English as most courses being run were English courses in virtual worlds at the time.

We felt that challenge number one of delivering all content to students inside the virtual world and not via external platforms would help us focus more on the communicative channels of the virtual environment. We thought that the second challenge of offering a course at the beginner's level would help us focus on the visual and building features of the environment and the in-built tools. Finally, the third challenge was an attempt to start creating resources and appropriate content in a language where content had not yet been developed.

This course was the first of a series of three iterations and adaptations. More detailed information about the course iterations can be found on the Avalon Learning wiki at: http://avalonlearning.pbworks.com/w/page/Description-of-the-Beginners-courses

Overview of the Course

This course has a highly flexible and adaptable course structure which is particularly suited for adult learners who come into the learning experience with clearly identified learning needs (they know what they want to learn and will ask for it) and who, because of busy work and personal schedules leading to erratic course attendance patterns, need core course concepts to be repeated frequently throughout the course. In addition to this, as the main target group was language teachers, a significant amount of time in the course description is devoted to "group reflection" over the learning process and environment itself.

The course is structured into 7 lessons but a longer module can also be created by starting with the first lesson and finishing with the final lesson and adding any number of lessons in-between. In other words, the course can change in duration according to

demand and need (see adaptations below). The course focuses on three main areas of learner development:

1. Acquisition, practice and repetition of the target language at the A1-A2 level (language skills)
2. Acquisition of technical expertise in the virtual environment (technical skills)
3. Awareness of the potential of virtual worlds for education and of the inter-relation between the virtual environment and the learning experience (critical skills)

The key design feature of the course is that it combines teacher presented material and input with learner input and contributions. Language items are both introduced to the learners and elicited from the learners making it easy for "false-beginners" to be included and contribute to the course. All language items and technical skills are repeated cyclically throughout the course and made available to all learners making it easy for students to drop in and out of the course.

The course content is presented in terms of the "Can do" statements of the EU Common Framework of Reference at the A1 and A2 level (http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf). For the technical skills, we created a similar "Can do" statement list against which student progress can also be measured. The acquisition of knowledge and skills can be measured against these statements in the final sessions (examination section below). More detailed information about the course syllabus and "Can do" statements for avatars can be found on the Avalon Learning wiki at:

http://avalonlearning.pbworks.com/w/page/Italian-Beginners-Course-%28Grundtvig%29

Requirements and Recommendations

Language Level: Beginners (A1-A2)

Prior Knowledge of virtual worlds: The students require no prior knowledge. The teacher should have basic skills (communication and movement) but the course can be adapted to suit varying student language levels and teacher skills. See *Adaptations* below.

Recommended size of group: 15 or smaller

Target audience: Language teachers and trainers and adult learners in general

Number of lessons: A minimum of 7 which can be expanded on according to need. See *Adaptations* below.

Virtual world environment requirements:

An open environment with plenty of space for new avatars to move around and acquaint themselves with the environment. It is suggested, however, that for first meetings, smaller, enclosed spaces might be preferred so that avatars do not get lost or

fly away. However, these decisions will often depend on the individual teacher's virtual world classroom management preferences and skills

3D objects needed:
- **An SL white board** where snapshots/powerpoint slides (JPEG format for example) can be uploaded for group discussions and presentations
- a rich environment with different sorts of **objects** (e.g. flowers, trees, pathways, benches) with which learners can interact and talk about
- places suitable for group work, like a **campfire** and/or a **classroom**

Second Life tools used by students during the course:
The following is a list of basic tools students require during the first lessons.
Basic movement: walking, standing, sitting, flying, teleporting oneself.
Basic communication tools: activating voice chat, text chat, accepting and offering friendship, receiving and responding to an IM.
Additional tools are added as the course develops and are in-line with the *Course Overview* above, the *Course Learning Goals* below.

Course management tools
This course can be managed in various ways: email and/or a google group were two methods used under the project. In general, the only content made available to students during the course were records of the chat log from each lesson and no other LMS or material was used in line with the course challenges above.
Where the student body can meet face-to-face, a group introductory lesson may be useful where the students can get to know each other prior to the course. If not, a standard check-in and initiation process used under all courses is recommended where each student is individually checked in for sound, voice and movement prior to the first lesson. A tool like skype is always recommended as a back-up communication system during the initiating period into a virtual world.

Learning Goals

The two specific learning goals for this course were:
1) the acquisition of specific language features and communicative skills in the A1-A2 continuum
   (http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf)
2) the parallel acquisition of specific technical skills and communicative skills in the virtual environment (see the "Can do" statements for Avatars on the Avalon wiki at: http://avalonlearning.pbworks.com/w/page/Italian-Beginners-Course-%28Grundtvig%29)

The range of language features and technical skills may vary according to the group make-up. See the section below on "adaptations".

Storyboard

The main backdrop to the course is the development of learner awareness of the environment and how it relates to the learners' specific learning needs and the exploration of the learner/avatar relationship.

Reward Models

The main reward model for this course is to be found in the development of learner linguistic and technical skills and their awareness of this development. At the end of each session students were asked to discuss in the group how they had experienced the environment (their emotions and feelings) and the learning event (whether they felt they had achieved something). At the end of the course, students performed tasks that required the acquisition of specific linguistic and technical skills they had been exposed to during the course.

Technical initiation

Students are contacted individually via e-mail and are given instructional material (see http://avalonlearning.pbworks.com/w/page/7682825/Introductory-Multimedia-kit-for-learners). A time is then set when they can to meet an instructor or technician in SL in order to check that sound, chat and basic movements function as they should. In those cases where students have problems in creating their SL accounts and/or entering SL, the instructor can contact the student via Skype in order to give real time support. The technical initiation can take anything from a few minutes to 30 minutes depending of the difficulties encountered. Also note that students who are already experienced SL users may not need to go through this phase. Also note that the model described above applies to distance students who are not physically present on campus. Where students are present face-to-face, a pre-course workshop is also an effective and time efficient way of getting students started.

LESSON 1

Suggested virtual world environment: A wide open space with room to move around for the first activity. A smaller, cozier informal location is suggested for the introductions and *Getting-to-know-you* activity.

Suggested locations in Second Life**:**
Avalon Island (http://slurl.com/secondlife/AVALON/Learning/17/208/59) or Kamimo Island (http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/Kamimo/Island/116/133/25).

3D objects used: campfire or classroom

2D materials used: a record of the chat is saved by the teacher and sent to all students via email at the end of the lesson

Course management tools: email or a google group where record of the chat is saved by the teacher and sent to all students via email at the end of the lesson.

Aims

Main aim: socialising and familiarising with the environment.

Technical learning aim: basic movement in the environment; volume and talk controls.

Summary of Activities

- **Warm-up Gymnastics**: the basic avatar movements in Italian (imperative) in an open space (standing): walking, turning, sitting (flying may be introduced here as it is a fun and easy to do, however, students sometimes get lost and this can be a frustrating experience for learners and teachers alike during the first lesson).
- **The main learning event**: Introducing yourself and your avatar to the group; questions about each other sitting as a group (i.e. around a campfire or in a traditional classroom). Discussion of course expectations and individual learning objectives.
- **General group reflection**: How did this first session make you feel?
- **Revision of language input from the lesson**: imperatives, the present simple, adjectives, describing oneself and daily routines, asking personal questions, expressing emotion and feelings (*mi sento...insicura, agitato, frustrato, mi sto divertendo, sono comoda*).
- **Follow-up activity**/**Homework**: Students meet in pairs and explore the environment where their first lesson was held.

LESSON 2

Suggested virtual world environment: the same location as the first lesson
Suggested location in Second Life**:** Avalon Island
(http://slurl.com/secondlife/AVALON/Learning/17/208/59) or
Kamimo Island (http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/Kamimo/Island/116/133/25).
3D objects used: general locations on the learning island and objects that can be found there.
2D materials used: a record of the chat is saved by the teacher and sent to all students via email at the end of the lesson.
Course management tools: email or a google group where record of the chat is saved by the teacher and sent to all students via email at the end of the lesson.
Aims
Main aim: exploring the environment
Technical learning aim: increased movement in the environment; offering and accepting friendship; receiving IMs from your teacher; sending IMs to friends; taking snapshots and saving them.
Summary of Activities
Now students know a bit more about each other from their first lesson and feel less awkward in the group, more time can be dedicated to familiarising themselves with the basic skills of moving within the environment. Socialising can pick up on the community building activity of the first lesson and take place spontaneously among students as they come into the environment as they would in a face-to-face classroom.
- **Welcome and greetings and commenting on appearance**
- **Warm-up Gymnastics**: the basic avatar movements in Italian (imperative) in an open space (standing). This session is initially led by the teacher but is an activity that can be taken over by students in turn as the course progresses: repetition of the warm-up activities of the first lesson plus the introduction of flying.

- **The main learning event**: giving and asking for directions
- **Revision and repetition of language input from the lesson**: imperative, directions, asking for help, the interrogative form, describing physical appearance and clothing.
- **General group reflection about the lesson**
- **Follow-up activity/homework**: Students take snapshots of their favourite place on the learning island and send them to the teacher via email for discussion in the next lesson.

LESSON 3

Suggested virtual world environment: an environment in which all students feel comfortable and with which they are already familiar. Ideally, the same locations the students have been using from the beginning.
Suggested locations in Second Life: Avalon Island (http://slurl.com/secondlife/AVALON/Learning/17/208/59) or
Kamimo Island (http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/Kamimo/Island/116/133/25)..
3D objects used: a whiteboard or presentation screen
2D materials used: a record of the chat is saved by the teacher and sent to all students via email at the end of the lesson.
Course management tools: email or a google group where record of the chat is saved by the teacher and sent to all students via email at the end of the lesson.
Aims
*Main aim***:** creating a personal connection with the environment
Technical learning aim: teleporting friends
Summary of Activities
Now students are becoming more familiar with the environment, they may start to take greater initiative in socializing with other course members and time should be allocated within the lesson for this to take place.
- **Welcome and greetings and social chit chat**
- **The main learning event**: presenting your favourite location on the island and teleporting friends
- **Summary and revision of language input**: social chit chat, giving and receiving instructions, travelling, describing an experience, present perfect, *imperfetto*.
- **General group reflection about the lesson**
- **Follow up activity/homework**: Exploration of a SL location in pairs and practicing interaction with objects (i.e. opening and closing doors, touching objects).

LESSON 4

Suggested virtual world environment: The virtual world will need to allow teleporting from one place/island to another.
Suggested locations in Second Life: Avalon Island
(http://slurl.com/secondlife/AVALON/Learning/17/208/59) or
Kamimo Island (http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/Kamimo/Island/116/133/25)..
Additional locations identified by the course teacher as suitable for students to explore.
3D objects used: no special objects are required
2D materials used: a record of the chat is saved by the teacher and sent to all students via email at the end of the lesson.
Course management tools: email or a google group where record of the chat is saved by the teacher and sent to all students via email at the end of the lesson.
Aims
Main aim: exploring the wider environment of SL
Technical learning aim: using the search and teleport functions to explore the virtual world
Summary of Activities
As students become more comfortable in the environment and within their learning community, more complex language structures and technological features can be introduced.
* **Welcome and greetings and social chit chat**
* **The main learning event**: using the search engine for travel
* **Summary of language input**: social chit chat, talking about the working week or day, giving and receiving instructions, travelling, describing an experience, present perfect, *imperfetto*.
* **General group reflection about the lesson**
* **Follow up activity/homework**: Exploration in pairs of a SL location where Italian language/culture is promoted. Snapshots of the experience are sent to the teacher

LESSON 5

Suggested virtual world environment: The virtual world will need to allow teleporting from one place/island to another.
Suggested locations in Second Life: Avalon Island
(http://slurl.com/secondlife/AVALON/Learning/17/208/59) or
Kamimo Island (http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/Kamimo/Island/116/133/25).
Additional locations identified by the students as interesting and worth visiting.
3D objects used: a whiteboard
2D materials used: a record of the chat is saved by the teacher and sent to all students via email at the end of the lesson.
Course management tools: email or a google group where record of the chat is saved by the teacher and sent to all students via email at the end of the lesson.

Aims

Main aim: consolidation of language content and evaluation of general SL sites for the learning of the target language

Technical learning aim: consolidation of all technical skills acquired so far

Summary of Activities

As students have become more and more familiar with the environment, they begin to develop critical skills and to make value judgements about how SL might be used for their individual learning aims.

- **Welcome and greetings**
- **The main learning event**: Reporting on travel and evaluation of language learning potential of main grid SL locations
- **Language input**: describing travel experiences, describing photos, expressing emotional reactions and expressing value judgements, talking about the learning experience.
- **General group reflection about the lesson**
- **Follow up activity**: A powerpoint slide to be sent to the teacher summarising or displaying individual linguistic and technical achievement in the virtual world using a "Can do" statement list.

LESSON 6

Suggested virtual world environment: Suggested location in Second Life: Avalon Island (http://slurl.com/secondlife/AVALON/Learning/17/208/59)

3D objects used: a whiteboard

2D materials used: a record of the chat is saved by the teacher and sent to all students via email at the end of the lesson.

Course management tools: email or a google group where record of the chat is saved by the teacher and sent to all students via email at the end of the.

Aims

Main aim: revision of course language content

Technical learning aim: presenting a slide in a virtual world and learning to receive and send notecards with specific information

Summary of Activities:

This second last session gives the student the opportunity to revise course language content in a meaningful way (presentation to the group) and for the teacher to give back feedback. Listening to the others present also reinforces content.

- **Welcome and greetings**
- **The main learning event**: presenting a powerpoint slide of the linguistic and technical "can do" achievements and sending the audience a notecard with additional information
- **Language input**: revision
- **General group reflection about the lesson**

- **Follow up activity**: Students agree to meet in pairs in SL to prepare for the end-of-course test.

LESSON 7
Suggested virtual world environment: Suggested locations in Second Life: *Avalon Island* (http://slurl.com/secondlife/AVALON/Learning/17/208/59) or
Kamimo Island (http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/Kamimo/Island/116/133/25).
3D objects used: no particular items
2D materials used: no particular items
Course management tools: email or a google group so that the final results can be communicated to students and any information from the last lesson is available.
Aims
Main aim: end of course evaluation of students.
Technical learning aim: no aim.
Summary of Activities
Students will receive instructions from their teacher via email at the beginning of the lesson or via notecards in SL. The students will be assigned a partner with whom they will carry out the task. Each student will be expected to carry out a 5 minute task. The task will reflect course content and will combine language skills with technical skills. Tasks may include: sending an IM, teleporting a friend, taking a snapshot, giving directions, social chit chat, etc. The teacher can decide whether to observe individual student pairs one at a time or ask the pairs to perform the task in front of the group.
- **Welcome and greetings**
- **The main learning event**: evaluation of students
- **General group reflection about the course and farewells**
- **Information about evaluation feedback and end of course results**

Evaluation of students
The course devotes the last lesson to the testing of student language and technical proficiency. Student progress can be measured against the course learning goals and individual proficiency levels upon course commencement. The ideal course testing scenario is a joint task (student pairs) in the virtual environment based on the course syllabus and where students can demonstrate their language and technical proficiency in a meaningful way. For more ideas about testing students in the course, see the *End-of-course Evaluation and Testing* section for the course in the Avalon Learning wiki at:
http://avalonlearning.pbworks.com/w/page/Italian-Beginners-Course-%28Grundtvig%29
See also below for a discussion of adaptations of this model.

Reflections
One of the greatest challenges of this course was to address the beginner level via a *lingua franca* and to provide all content in the virtual world without the support of a traditional LMS. In many ways, the course was constructed like a "living text book" where the physical environment (including the avatars themselves) was used as the main prompt for language development and input. Records of avatar chat was saved

Access to Virtual and Action Learning live ONline

and sent to students and used like "notes" from the lesson students could study in their own time.

Adaptations

This course can be readily adapted to suit any student level and any level of teacher expertise in the virtual environment.

As far as students are concerned, first of all, this course can be adapted in a number of ways in terms of the LMS and the quantity of material available to students outside the virtual world.

Secondly, the range of language features and technical skills developed during the course may vary according to the group make-up and the specific educational requirements of individual learning institutions.

Thirdly, the course can be shortened or made longer according to teacher needs as the course is neatly framed within the first and the last session. The longer the course, the higher the language level, the longer and/or more detailed or more in-depth the final testing sessions might need to be.

Fourthly, this course was designed specifically for learners with no or limited experience of virtual worlds. However, for future adaptations, one may want to consider the same course concept with students with higher levels of technical expertise. It may also be worth considering what happens when learners have divergent levels of technical expertise (will this lead to some students dominating the course or will it lead to students teaching and helping each other?). For high levels of technical competence, most of the activities in this course description will not be appropriate.

As far as testing of student proficiency is concerned, if teachers or institutions feel that this needs to be carried out outside the virtual world platform, individual supplementary tasks can be envisaged (written exam based on the course syllabus for example) or a recording of the student exchange can be captured for viewing by other examiners or peer feedback. See the section on *Machinima* in the Avalon wiki at: http://avalonlearning.pbworks.com/w/page/33047585/Machinima%20-%20Recording%20in%20Second%20Life

As far as teacher skills are concerned, the general recommendation is that the teacher adapts the course to suit individual teacher competence in the environment.