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Deliverable 6.3: WP6 Evaluation Report

WP6: The Piloting of the teacher training course and its evaluation

(University of Manchester: Gary Motteram, Zeynep Onat-Stelma, Susan Brown)

This report, although presented separately, continues on from the WP5 report. Whilst the WP5 report focused on the preparation for the Teacher Training Course, looking at the process of the design and finalisation of the course syllabus and Moodle, the selection of teachers and the preparation of tutors for the course, this report focuses on the actual running of the Teacher Training Course, the feedback from teachers and tutors at the end of the course, examples of dissemination based on the course and the activities taking place as a continuation of the course to support teachers in taking the next step to start teaching in Second Life. The feedback received for the teacher training course will inform decisions for improving the course for subsequent use by other language teacher trainers.

1. Meeting of tutors prior to each session

In preparation for the two sessions of teaching per week in Second Life, tutors met with their teaching partners to discuss what activities they would do in these sessions. There were also e-mail exchanges between tutors of the two groups before sessions where tutors told each other where they were likely to do their session on AVALON Island. This was necessary as tutors wanted to avoid having the two groups close to each other during sessions. The sessions for both groups took place at exactly the same time. However, as the island is quite large, there were no problems relating to one group interfering with another group or hearing another group throughout the 6 week period. Feedback from tutors after the course suggests that more organised and systematic interaction between tutors of the two groups would have been useful in terms of the activities conducted in the two groups. Although partner tutors met regularly, there was not a lot of interaction between the tutors of the two



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groups apart from the e-mail exchanges about logistics. In the reiteration of this pilot this is one area that will be taken into consideration for improvement (see more details in section 5.2).

2. Contributions to Moodle by teachers and tutors

A discussion forum was set up in Moodle for each week's content and teachers were encouraged by their respective tutors to post their ideas and experiences in this forum. There was active participation by teachers in this discussion forum with some comments from tutors as well. Appendix 1 includes some exchanges on the Moodle for certain teaching topics.

Feedback from teachers after the course suggested that they could have been more active in Moodle but that the intensity of the course (meeting twice a week for two hours) was already quite time-consuming and that they did not have as much time as they would have liked to make use of Moodle more effectively. In future courses, particular emphasis could be put on strengthening the presence of Moodle and on providing teachers with more chances and encouragement to make use of Moodle. The aim should be to make Moodle a more integral aspect of this course than it has been in the pilot of this course.

3. Recording of sessions

Both groups of teacher training sessions were recorded as much as it was possible and as effectively as it was possible to do so. The recordings were done for internal purposes only and will not be made public. The recordings were carried out by someone other than the tutors, either by parties directly involved in the AVALON project or other Second Life enthusiasts in the field of language education who were interested in developing their recording skills in Second Life. There were quite a few issues related to recording especially with respect to software functioning slightly differently on the computers of those recording. For example, for one person, while they were recording using specific software (i.e. CamStudio), their avatar could not move. This meant that they could not follow the group of tutors and teachers around the AVALON Island.

4. End of course presentations by teachers

Just before the fourth week of the course teachers were asked to get together, ideally, in pairs, in preparation for their final presentations. They



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were given the task for their final presentation (this was also put up on Moodle earlier on in the course) which comprised of the following parts. Firstly, they were asked to produce a 10 minute PowerPoint presentation (to present in **SL**) describing a lesson which takes account of the potential of SL for their teaching context(s). They were told that the presentation should be accompanied by a plan of the lesson (no more than 2 sides of A4 paper) which they could then put into the Moodle area. The second part of the task asked teachers to do **one activity** from their lesson (15 minutes) during the session briefly describing what they want the activity to achieve and then doing the activity with the teachers - who would act as learners. Teachers were told that they needed to participate in the project to receive a certificate at the end of the course. They were also told that the AVALON team may ask for their permission to publish their ideas under their names in a teaching manual that will be produced for other teachers wishing to use SL for language teaching (see section 7).

As part of the preparation for the presentations the teachers were shown how to use Powerpoint slides in Second Life. The fifth week of the course was mostly devoted to teachers working on their presentations and activities. Interviews with teachers after the course showed that teachers met in their pairs frequently outside of course times to work on their presentations. Some comments from teachers after the course suggested that they had to spend quite a lot of time outside of class hours to prepare for the course when they had busy teaching schedules in their daytime jobs. However, the 26 hours devoted to self-study in this course would justify the preparation periods out of the teacher-tutor session times. Teachers commented that the opportunity to work in pairs (and in groups of three) gave them opportunities for useful interaction with teachers with the same goals as themselves. Some of the pairs and groups who worked together during the course or for the final presentations have taken their friendship and collegiality outside the boundaries of the course by collaborating on teaching related events in Second Life or by simply getting together socially in Second Life.

In the sixth (final) week of the course, both sessions were devoted to the teachers' presentations with pairs and groups choosing to present either on the Tuesday or Thursday of that week. The presentations and the subsequent activities from their presentations were carried out successfully. Tutors commented on each presentation after they were finished and fellow teachers also asked questions and made comments on the presentations. Tutors mainly commented on how well the ideas in the presentations were connected to theory of teaching and learning in Second Life (see Appendix 6 in WP5 report) and also on the appropriateness of the activities they designed for use in Second Life.



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Teachers were then asked to put up their lesson plans on Moodle (please see <http://lms.workademy.net>, Project Forum).

Teachers were presented with a certificate issued by one of our project partners, ICC International Language Network (see Appendix 2a and 2b for an example of the certificate).

5. Post-pilot feedback

This section will address the feedback received from teachers through questionnaires and feedback received from teachers and tutors through interviews.

5.1 Teacher Questionnaire

Once the teacher training course was complete, a questionnaire for teachers to fill out was prepared. The questionnaire was adapted from the more generic questionnaire prepared as part of Work Package 7 for students who took part in the language courses designed and piloted as part of the AVALON project. The questionnaire was adapted from the generic student questionnaire for standardisation purposes as the WP7 team were ultimately responsible for reporting on all feedback received from the courses. However, as the language teacher group can be considered substantially different from other language student groups, and because the teacher training course was quite different from language courses in its nature there were considerable changes made to the student questionnaire to make it appropriate for teachers.

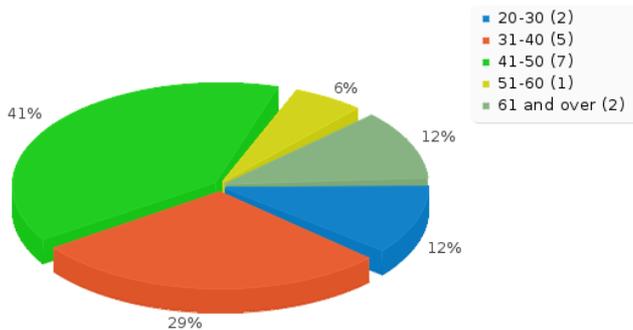
The questionnaire consisted of questions asking teachers about their experience with SL and with other online courses before the teacher training course, about their experience of using SL during the teacher training course, and their future thoughts and aims for using SL for teaching languages. It also included questions about whether teachers would be likely to pay for such a course and what improvements they felt could be made in this course. The full questionnaire can be found in Appendix 3. The summary of responses to the questionnaire is in Appendix 4.

17 out of 18 teachers participating in the course filled out the questionnaire. Figure 5.1 shows the age groups of the 17 teachers who participated in the teacher training course and who filled out the questionnaire.



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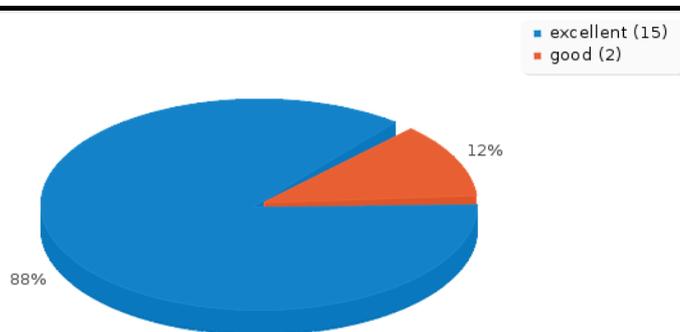
Figure 5.1: Age groups of participating teachers



Out of the 17 teachers, 13 had already participated in an online learning course and 14 of the teachers were already familiar with Second Life to an extent. In the future running of such a course, the aim would be to involve teachers who have had no experience of Second Life. In the selection of teachers we were not as strict as we could have been about taking on teachers who were new to Second Life and we now feel that if we had taken on teachers not yet familiar with Second Life the course might have had a greater impact as we would be introducing a greater number of teachers to Second Life for the first time.

The feedback about the instructors was positive in that 15 of the teachers said they thought the instructors were excellent and 2 of the teachers said they thought the instructors were good (on a scale ranging from excellent to poor) (see Figure 5.2).

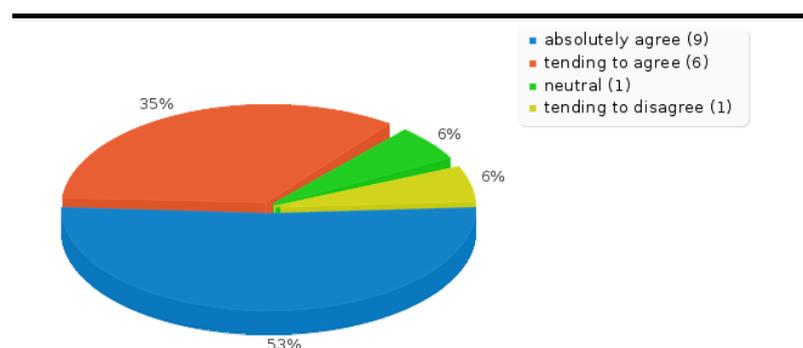
Figure 5.2: Responses by teachers to the statement: 'I thought the instructors were:' excellent/good/fair/poor/ no answer



There was also positive feedback about the learning environment (the areas where teaching took place on AVALON Island) and the assigned tasks with all teachers providing 'excellent' and 'good' as responses to these two aspects of the course. In terms of the length of the course all the teachers either absolutely agreed or tended to agree that the length was appropriate. However, some interviews that took place with teachers and tutors showed that teachers were struggling to complete their preparation for the final presentation and that one or two more weeks added to the course may be beneficial. This issue will be discussed in more detail in section 5.2.

Questions about the use of Moodle showed that most teachers felt there was appropriate 'out-of-world' support (see Figure 5.3). Only one teacher said they tended to disagree about there being sufficient 'out-of-world' support. In interviews conducted afterwards with teachers, some expressed concern about not having enough time to go into Moodle and contribute to and follow discussions. This issue will also be discussed in more detail in section 5.2.

Figure 5.3: Responses to the statement 'appropriate out-of-world support was provided'





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When answering a question about which issues were particularly helpful and beneficial to their progress in the course, the issue that got the most positive response was 'teacher-led sessions in Second Life'. Other issues that were presented to the respondents were 'resources/links/information in Moodle', 'personal preparation for the coming lesson', 'preparation for coming lesson with a team', 'group activities in SL', 'reflections of the instructors' (detailed responses to this question can be found in Appendix 4, pages 35-46). In a future running of such a course, as already mentioned in the previous paragraph, more emphasis could be placed on efficient and appropriate use of out-of-world and out-of-session support.

In terms of the technical difficulties teachers face in Second Life, the questionnaire shows that whereas before the sessions began 8 teachers did not tend to have difficulties handling SL, after the second session, 12 teachers either absolutely agreed or tended to agree that they felt 'quite comfortable with Second Life and their Avatar'.

Figure 5.4: Responses for the statement: 'Please choose the appropriate response for each of these statements about technical aspects and the environment in Second Life. [At the beginning I had difficulties with the handling of Second Life]

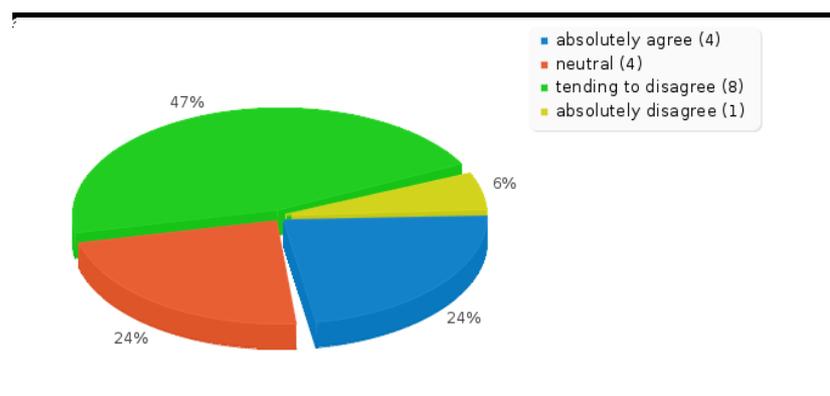
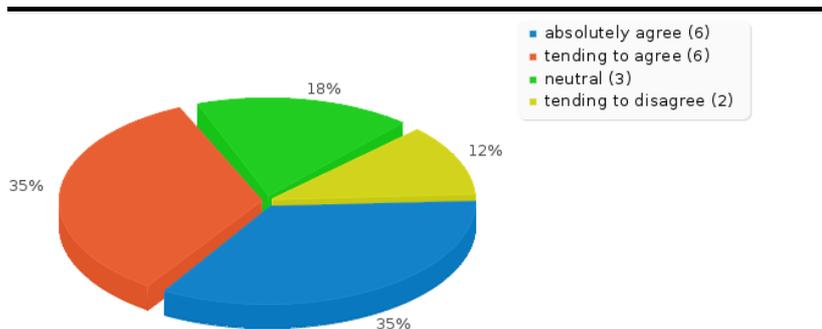


Figure 5.5: Responses for the statement: 'Please choose the appropriate response for each of these statements about technical aspects and the environment in Second Life. [After the second session I felt quite comfortable with Second Life and my Avatar]



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When asked about which aspects of the course were important for teachers and for their motivation to participate in the course, the two aspects with the most positive responses were, 'Getting to know Second Life better' (16 out of 17 said 'absolutely agree' to this) and 'Trying out new ideas/activities' (17 out of 17 said 'absolutely agree' to this).

Teachers were also asked to tick some descriptive adjectives that represented how they felt about the course in general. The majority of the adjectives that were ticked were 'motivated', 'curious', and 'excited'. The full set of responses to this question can be found in Appendix 4 (p.101-102).

17 out of the 17 teachers who responded to this questionnaire said 'yes' to the question, 'Has this teacher training course provided appropriate resources and ideas for you to think about teaching in Second Life?'. 16 out of 17 teachers said they would like to attend a course like this again, with one teacher saying they were not sure.

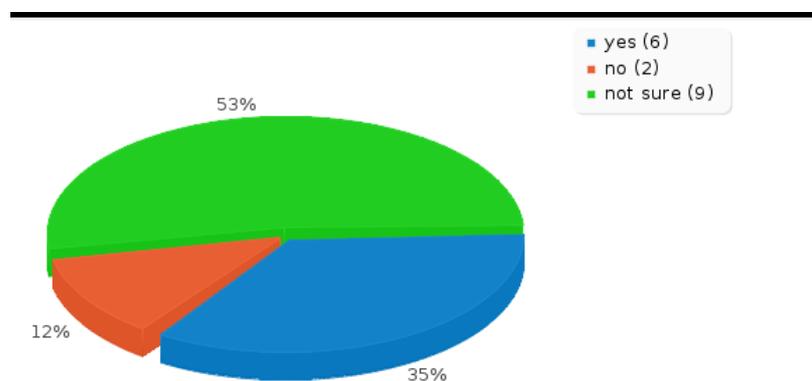
One of the more controversial issues relating to the course was whether teachers were likely to pay for such a course. This question received mixed responses as can be noted from Figure 5.6. Most of the teachers indicated in the questionnaire that they were not sure whether they would want to pay a fee for this course. However, when this question was followed up on in the interviews with teachers, those who said they were not sure said they did not really know how much money was at stake which was why they answered by saying 'not sure'. When provided with some figures like 100/200/300 Euros they said that they might consider paying for the course. The subsequent question in the questionnaire asked teachers if they would pay for such a course how much they would want to pay. On hindsight, if the teachers were provided options to choose from, there may have been more teachers who may have been more positive about paying as they would have seen the figures involved. It



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seems like there may have been quite a few teachers who answered they were not sure because they did not have any indication of how much it might cost.

Figure 5.6: Responses to the question: 'If this course required a fee would you attend it?'



When teachers were asked if they would recommend this course to others, all 17 teachers who answered the questionnaire said they would.

5.2 Teacher and Tutor Interviews

Following the analysis of the responses to the teacher questionnaire, teachers and tutors were contacted for a brief interview about the course. As a final question in the teacher questionnaire, teachers were asked if they minded being contacted for an interview and if a teacher said that they did mind then he/she was not approached with this request.

In the interviews with teachers and tutors, the first question asked was what they would change or want changed in this course and what they would want to keep the same if it were to be run again. There was a general consensus from teachers that they would want most of the aspects of the course to remain the same. The practical side of the course with building work and learning about Second Life and actually preparing lessons and presenting them to their fellow teachers were pointed out as strong aspects of the course and all the teachers said they enjoyed these elements of the course. According to teachers, working in groups to



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prepare their final presentations was a motivating and enriching experience because not only were they able to share experiences and ideas about their practice, they also got an understanding of teaching a language that they were not necessarily familiar with (as there were teachers teaching different languages in the groups).

Issues brought up by teachers in terms of improvement to the course involved the use of Moodle, the length of the course and the interaction between the two groups of teachers. Many of the teachers voiced that they would want Moodle to be updated more regularly. One teacher said they found the theoretical aspect of the course that was presented on Moodle 'a bit dry' and would have liked this aspect to be less formal and less academic. Teachers also commented on the discussion forum on Moodle, saying that it was a nice facility where they could exchange ideas.

Teachers shared the similar opinion that the length of the course could be extended such as to provide more time for them to prepare for their end of course presentations. This issue will be addressed for the future piloting of this course. Currently, the plan is to extend the course from six weeks to seven weeks. As for interaction between two groups of teachers, many teachers felt that they did not have the opportunity to meet and talk to teachers from the 'other' group until after the course when everyone met socially and as part of teacher support group meetings (see section 7). One teacher suggested that for one session the tutors could swap groups, so that the teachers could experience being taught by different tutors and different techniques. In a future running of the course tutors from the two groups could be encouraged more to organise meetings both as part of the sessions for short periods and out-of-sessions by creating social occasions. It may also be possible to switch tutors for groups on occasion as was suggested by one teacher.

One of the teachers said that they would have wanted to practice what she had learnt from the course by teaching an 'experiment' group of real language students. Such an initiative might be possible to organise if there is a language course running at the same time as the teacher training course and if the students of that course agree to participate one extra week where teachers practice their end of course lessons with real language students. This might not be easy to organise but if there was an organised initiative it might be possible to put into action in the future.

In response to a question about how they felt about Avalon Island itself, both as a learning environment and recreationally, teachers said they felt



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it was a place that was pleasing to the eye, with a lot of green areas and that it was "natural looking". One teacher commented on how functional she felt the Island was for her purposes and she felt the Business Barn, <http://slurl.com/secondlife/AVALON%20Learning/134/189/33/>, the Sandbox, <http://slurl.com/secondlife/AVALON%20Learning/116/63/36/>, and the Teacher's Meeting Area, <http://slurl.com/secondlife/AVALON%20Learning/75/227/40/> were particularly conducive for teaching and learning activities. The same teacher commented that she "felt at home on the island". A more technical comment from a teacher about the island was that she thought the Second Life lag was reduced on this island, especially when there was a low number of Avatars on the island. One other teacher said that she felt the hills on the island made it look interesting but she had some difficulty navigating around the hills. She added that the places used for teaching were varied and lent themselves to being used in different ways with different types of activities.

Tutors who were interviewed after the training course were all positive about how the course was structured. They all felt that the detailed course schedule was a big help as they always knew what they would be aiming for. In creating activities for each session, some tutors felt that it may have been more effective in terms of standardisation for tutors of both groups to get together to brainstorm about what activities they could do. In a future running of this course, one idea suggested by a tutor was that a meeting be arranged before the course started where all the tutors spend a bit of time planning together for all the sessions. This would involve tutors putting forth ideas for activities they would want to do for each session. This might create more unity among tutors of the two different groups than that existed in the first run of the pilot.

6. Dissemination on the teacher training course

One of the tutors on the Teacher Training course, Joe Pereira, delivered a presentation on the teacher training course shortly after it ended at an international conference in the United Kingdom ("Avalon to Shakespeare: Language learning and teaching in virtual worlds", IATEFL Harrogate 2010). The video link to his presentation can be found at <http://iatefl.britishcouncil.org/2010/sessions/2010-04-09/avalon-shakespeare-language-learning-and-teaching-virtual-worlds-joe-pereira>



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In addition, a panel discussion was arranged by one of our partners from Lancelot School, Heike Philp, as part of an online conference (Virtual Round Table conference 2010), where the tutors of the teacher training course (Holly Sue Longstroth, Nergiz Kern, Joe Pereira, Graham Stanley and Zeynep Onat-Stelma) briefly described the course and answered questions about the course.

Luisa Panichi, another partner of the AVALON project based at the University of Pisa in Italy, has delivered a presentation on the teacher training course in Italy. She gave this presentation together with an Italian teacher who participated in the teacher training course, Anna Lazzari (see Appendix 5).

Gary Motteram presented on the teacher training course as part of his talk at the EuroCALL conference Teacher Education Special Interest Group (<http://europe.univ-lyon2.fr/teacher-education-in-CALL/topic/index.html>).

Zeynep Onat-Stelma and Joe Pereira carried out a joint presentation on the Teacher Training Course at SLanguages 2010 Conference (<http://avalon-project.ning.com/page/slanguages-2010-summary>) where they presented the aims of the course, various elements of the course, feedback from teachers to the course, and they demonstrated some of the activities that were used in the course.

7. Supporting language teachers in Second Life

Following the teacher training course, the idea of providing opportunities for teachers to meet regularly in Second Life was developed and one of the tutors, Nergiz Kern, was approached in an attempt to combine her group of teachers (Slexperiments) with the group of teachers who had done the teacher training course. To this effect an initial meeting was organised where the teachers from the two groups met. There was a lot of interest for this meeting which paved the way for the organisation of more regular meetings. Beginning from mid-June 2010, a teacher support group meeting has been taking place twice a month (on the first Friday and the third Wednesday of the month) where teachers have a chance to share teaching ideas if they are teaching, to improve their Second Life skills, improve their practices of building and creating objects, learn about and share new developments in Second Life and generally be of support to each other. These sessions are led by Nergiz Kern who is currently active in teacher training in Second Life and Zeynep Onat-Stelma, a member of the AVALON team from the University of Manchester.



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Furthermore, teachers are provided support by being encouraged to put their practices to use by taking part in language courses offered as part of the AVALON project as tutors. One such initiative has already taken place where an English teacher who took part in the teacher training course has been invited to observe the Business Course run by the AVALON team during the summer 2010 with the understanding that she might be able to help out other tutors in future language courses. Tutors from the teacher training course have suggested that this could be a useful way forward for supporting teachers who had completed the teacher training course.

A further component of supporting teachers in Second Life will be the preparation of a Teacher's Handbook that will be based on the sessions covered in the course but which will also include a variety of resources that teachers who wish to teach languages in Second Life will be able to make use of (<http://avalonlearning.pbworks.com/w/page/Teacher-Training-Manual>). This Handbook will be made accessible to everyone with the hope that we can encourage and interest as many teachers around the world as possible to teach languages in Second Life.

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