

## Second Life® as a virtual platform for language education

Christel Schneider, Luisa Panichi

E-mail: [christel.schneider@icc-languages.eu](mailto:christel.schneider@icc-languages.eu), [panichi@cli.unipi.it](mailto:panichi@cli.unipi.it)

ICC International Language Network (Germany), Centro Linguistico Interdipartimentale - Università di Pisa (Italy)

### Abstract

Online Learning is often described by its participants as isolated because of the lack of community. With recent developments and web 2.0 applications new tools are available that allow teachers and students to meet online in ways that are comparable with face-to-face events. This paper would like to introduce Second Life® (SL) a Multi-User Virtual Environment as a virtual platform for foreign language education and learner engagement. SL is a 3D virtual world accessible via the Internet. A free client programme enables its users to interact with each other through 'Avatars'. An 'avatar' is the graphical representation of a computer user representing himself/herself or alter ego. Recent literature in the field endorses SL as a particularly appropriate platform for the development of oral language proficiency in distance education, collaborative and intercultural learning contexts and vocational training. The authors in particular would like to share their experience from the ongoing European project **AVALON** for the design, testing and implementation of language teaching and learning in Second Life. Avalon (Access to Virtual and Action Learning live ONline) is a 2 year multilateral project funded under the EU EACEA Life Long Learning Programme and runs until December 2010. The 26 participating European partners include 10 state funded universities and 16 other public and private organisations operating in the following areas: language education, teacher training, intercultural training, language testing and certification, online education, publishing, business communication and networking, design of 3D environments and language learning in Second Life®. The project is a transversal programme which targets language learners from the Leonardo da Vinci, Erasmus and Grundtvig communities. Not only does the project aim to create a platform in which these diverse learning communities can come together but it also has a particular interest in providing access to technology and language learning to learners in remote locations. Furthermore, part of the resources of the AVALON project will be allocated to the development of a 50 hour introductory teacher training course for teachers who are new to SL and wish to take an experimental approach. Indeed, the ultimate aim of the project is not only to provide access to virtual environments for teaching and learning of languages but also to ensure the establishment of a sustainable community of practitioners and users which will outlive the project itself. This paper will thus illustrate the action learning process through which best practice models are being developed. These models will be discussed in relation to established and ongoing research in the field and in particular in terms of their role in fostering successful learning outcomes in the virtual world of SL. Finally, this paper will provide examples of learning scenarios that have been designed and are being implemented under the project including courses for Debating and Academic English, Business English, Italian for Beginners, English for the Catering Industry and Tandem language learning set-ups.