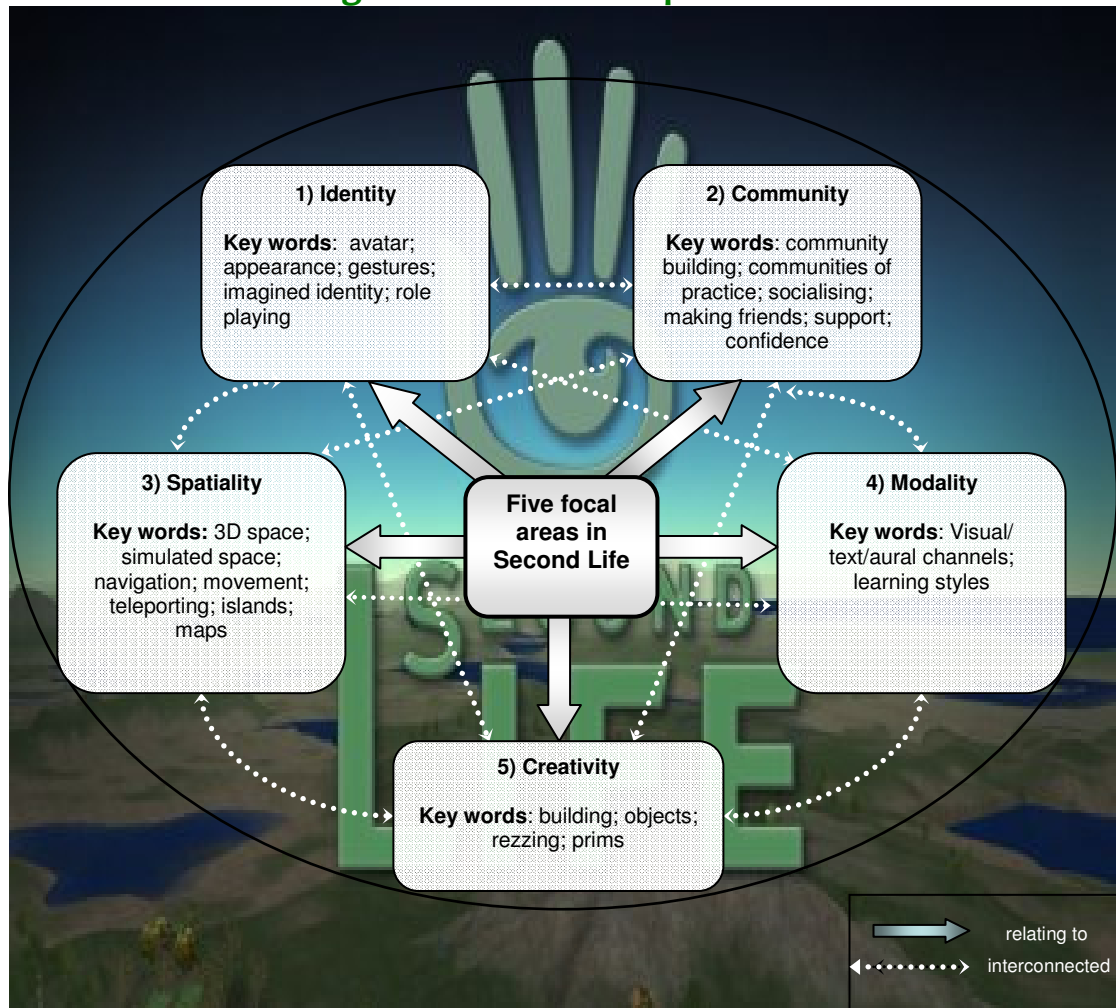


## Appendix 6: Second Life Conceptualisation

### An introduction to evaluating the potential of Second Life in Language Education

Figure 1: Five areas of potential



There are different ways of thinking about the potential of Second Life in education. Steven Warburton, a researcher in the potential of Second Life in education, sees Second Life as compelling to users because it ‘blurs the boundaries between:

- Corporeality and transcendence
- The real and virtual
- Where and nowhere
- Single and multiple selves’

You can see Steven's slide show on the potential of Second Life via the following link: <http://www.slideshare.net/stevenw/muves-and-second-lives-exploring-education-in-second-life?src=embed> (also available under 'Useful links' in Moodle).

Those of you who have used Second Life may find it compelling in one or more of the above bullet pointed ways. Maybe you find it compelling for other reasons? Maybe you don't find it compelling at all? This course is designed not only to equip you with basic skills you will need to teach in Second Life but also to look at why Second Life may be a compelling technology to use in language education. The course explores innovative and imaginative ways you might exploit the potential of Second Life for language teaching in your context.

It is a good idea to have a frame of reference for thinking about the nature of Second Life and its potential in language education. The five focal areas in the Figure 1 visual above allow a shared means of doing so. Let us now briefly explore how they may usefully inform our explorations and discussion.

**Identity:** In the real world it is often assumed that each individual has one identity, which is culturally, socially and linguistically rooted. If your SL avatar is a projection of yourself into the virtual, then you are projecting your one identity into virtual space. Some people would argue, however, that, in the real world, individuals can have multiple identities, or rather that they move fluidly between different aspects of themselves: As language is bound up with a sense of identity, is it possible for speakers of different languages to draw on, or discover, different aspects of themselves when using different languages? Maybe you know someone who has said to you something like "I feel like a different person when I speak another language"? Maybe you feel that way yourself? Steven Warburton (see above) says that Second Life 'blurs the boundaries' between 'single and multiple selves'. Can Second Life therefore be used as a way of allowing language learners to explore 'new' identities as speakers of other languages? How might we, as teachers, harness Second Life to this end? This is a question we'll be thinking about.

**Modality:** For much of human history, communication took place verbally and through signs, symbols and images. Writing scripts, which emerged from different combinations of the above, made symbols accessible across cultures. Until recently writing has predominated as a means of communicating across cultures. Now, however, we are communicating cross culturally in increasingly multimodal ways through combinations of the written word, the spoken word and visuals, such as photographs and video. In language education we talk of writing skills, speaking skills, reading skills and listening skills. These tend to be explored discretely. However, increasingly in an online world, learners will be dealing with all of these channels of communication *at the same time*. This is particularly true Second Life where we have visual channels, text channels and aural channels, often being used simultaneously. Once again we need to think about the role that Second Life can play in fostering these multimodal skills in language learners and how we might do that.

**Community:** For most people learning a language provides a means of communicating and socialising with others and becoming a part of, or forging communities. 'Community' with its culture, habits and purpose, is seen as central to learning by many in education. You may have heard the term 'communities of

practice' (see Wenger, 1998) where people join or become part of a community with a shared interest or profession, or the term 'communities of learners' (see, for example Anderson, 2005) where learners are participants in learning rather than recipients of knowledge.

Second Life is often talked about in terms of a 'community', or 'communities'. We'll be thinking about why this is the case, and how, as language teachers, we can harness that potential for community building to create thriving language learning communities.

**Spatiality:** In the 'real world' we move through three dimensional space and many metaphors in language are underpinned by concepts of space. In most online environments you work with a flat surface (screen) with text or images on it. Virtual Worlds such as Second Life allow people to interact with geographically remote people in 'three dimensions'. You can be in Paris, another person in Budapest, another in Odessa or Beijing and you can all meet up in a three-dimensional World. This is the first time the human race has been able to do this. As language teachers we are only just beginning to think about what this might mean for language education. How, then, can language teachers exploit the three-dimensional nature of Second Life? This is something we'll be thinking about.

**Creativity:** The idea that some people learn kinaesthetically has been researched and discussed in the fields of linguistics and language learning theory. Learning can happen not only through auditory and visual channels but also by interacting with things/objects; by touching them, moving them etc. This makes notions that may seem abstract, concrete, providing potentially important opportunities for learning.

Second Life allows you not only to interact with objects in three-dimensional space, but also to build objects with which others can interact. Once again we need to ask ourselves how we might harness this feature of Second Life effectively in language learning.

You'll see that we now have a set of questions relating to the five focal areas. Over the duration of this course we hope that, together, we will be able to explore these questions and in a spirit of communal creativity, provide interesting answers to them!

### **Other frameworks**

There are other ways of thinking about the potential of Second Life in education. Steven Warburton, for example, provides a list of the ways that Second Life can be used in education (see slide 12 of Steve's slide share presentation). While Steve is not talking about language education specifically it is easy to see the relevance of, for example, 'facilitating social interaction' for that purpose.

### **References**

Anderson, T., Annand, D. & Wark, N. (2005). The search for learning community in learner-paced distance education programming, or "Having your cake and eating it, too!". *Australian Journal of Educational Technology*, 21 (2), 222-241.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of Practice. Learning as a social system.* Systems Thinker.