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Deliverable 5.3: WP5 Report

WP5: Preparation of Teacher Training Course

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This report includes a detailed description of the piloting of the teacher training course and where appropriate feedback received from teachers and tutors will also be included. The WP6 report, which follows on from this report, includes more of the feedback as it focuses on the actual running of the course and the reactions to the course at the end of the course.

The report is structured to describe the process of preparing for the training course in a timeline from start to end. This includes the preparation of the course schedule, preparation of the course content and Moodle, organisation of the day and time of the sessions, preparation of the flyer for the course, selection of the participating teachers, finalising of the Moodle site and the starting of the course.

For the purposes of this report the teachers taking part in the teacher training course as students will be referred to as 'Teachers' and the tutors teaching on the course will be referred to as 'Tutors'.

1. Preparation of the course schedule

The preparation of the schedule of the teacher training course began in October 2009. The first draft of the course schedule was first circulated among AVALON partners for feedback. It was then brought to the interim meeting that took place in the beginning of December 2009 in Vienna where further feedback was collected from project partners. The final draft was ready by the end of January 2010. The course schedule can be found in Appendix 1.

The course schedule includes topics to be covered in the course both in terms of developing skills in operating in Second Life and in terms of developing language skills (see Appendix 1 for more detail). The topics



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were set out on a weekly basis, which meant that tutors could decide how to distribute the topics of each week through the two sessions.

2. The Course Content and the Preparation of Moodle

The Manchester team asked the AVALON partners at Talkademy (Gerhilde Meissl-Egghart and Klaus Hammermuller; based in Austria) if they could get access as administrators to use their Moodle for the AVALON Teacher Training Course. Once we, as the Manchester team, were given access for this we developed a Moodle site for the training course on <http://lms.workademy.net/course/category.php?id=3>. Access to this site is open to everyone via the 'guest login'.

All the work on Moodle was done by the University of Manchester team. Before the course started all relevant information which included the course schedule, information about the tutors and links to different types of resources, and a theoretical framework for teaching and learning languages in SL were put up on Moodle. As the course progressed, more links were added to various resources that tutors used in their sessions. All the tutors and teachers were then invited to introduce themselves in their profiles, to write a few words on the discussion forum and to encourage teachers to make use of this forum from the beginning of the course. All the teachers filled in their profile pages. There was a lot of input to the discussion forum from the first week (see section 2 in the WP6 Report for more detail).

The content of the course, including the schedule itself and everything on Moodle was designed to be of as much help to tutors in delivering their sessions. One element that was not included in the course content was suggestions for activities to be used to teach the topics on the syllabus. The choice in the amount of and type of activities to be used in class was mainly left to the discretion of the tutors. This led to tutors of the two groups doing different activities in their sessions, which was anticipated and endorsed by the developers of this course. The tutors of the two groups would come together before sessions to talk about what activities they had planned and to share ideas. In reality, once the course got underway, tutors of the two groups did not have that much time to get together before sessions and mostly did their own activities and there was a feeling, among tutors, that the nature of the activities was quite different in the two groups. In a possible rerun of such a course where



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there a two groups of teachers/students, it might be important to set aside time in the schedule for tutors of the two groups to meet each other to discuss their activities and possibly share some ideas and/or prepare some activities together. This may then provide some more standardisation in the teaching activities between two groups. This issue will be readdressed in WP6 Report, section 5.2.

3. Organisation of the length, day, time of the sessions

Organisation of the time of the sessions of the teacher training course required taking into account a number of issues. These were to do with the length of the course, number of teacher–tutor contact hours, number of teacher self-study hours and the nature of the assessment at the end of the course. One of the main debates we had as the Manchester team was about the length of the course. We discussed whether the course should run for six or eight weeks. We decided on a six week course based on our calculations made with the 50 hours specified by the deliverables of this work package. At the time we felt that a more compact course, with two sessions in a week in a shorter time frame would be more appropriate for the pilot, instead of keeping it longer with fewer contact hours per week, as we were not sure whether a course that was longer than six weeks might be too long for teachers who already had a busy teaching schedule outside Second Life. We specified this area as one for which we could get feedback from teachers once the course was complete with a view to making amendments for future courses. Feedback from teachers and tutors on the length of the course can be found in sections 5.1 and 5.2 of the WP6 Report.

We decided to have two days with sessions of two hours in a week. This amounted to twenty four hours of contact time between teachers and tutors. We felt that the remaining twenty six hours should be devoted to teachers doing some self study and contributing to discussion forums in Moodle and also to some preparation time for their final presentations.

Teachers were told they would be presented a certificate that would allow them to teach languages in Second Life at the end of the course if they attended regularly and if they completed the end of course project. This certificate is organised by one of our project partners, ICC International Language Network (see Appendix 2a and 2b of the WP6 report for an example of the certificate). We felt that the end of course project for the course should involve the teachers' preparing a lesson in pairs or groups



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of three and presenting a part of this lesson during the final session as a peer-teaching session.

For the purposes of the pilot we felt that team teaching on the part of the tutors would be more productive both for tutors and teachers. Tutors would be able to bring their respective experiences together in preparing their lessons and teachers would benefit from having two tutors in cases where there were technical difficulties. In such cases of difficulty one tutor could help with technical aspects of Second Life while the other tutor could carry the lesson forward.

Tutors with experience of teaching in Second Life were asked if they were interested in teaching in the teacher training course and five tutors showed interest in teaching on the course. Of these five tutors, three are involved in the AVALON project directly, Graham Stanley (British Council), Holly Sue Longstroth (Lancelot School), and Zeynep Onat-Stelma (University of Manchester). Of the other two tutors, Joe Pereira works for the British Council and Nergiz Kern is an experienced educator in Second Life. To organise the actual schedule of teaching, the tutors were asked to provide their available time slots. The pairing of tutors was made according to the time slots they were available for. In one group, two tutors did all the teaching together. However, in the second group, one tutor paired with a different tutor for the two sessions due to their work commitments out of SL. In future courses we would endeavour, where feasible, to organise the schedule so that participants can have the same two tutors throughout. However, despite the arrangement of tutors in this way, the feedback from teachers and tutors about working with three tutors instead of two in the second group was positive. The general feeling was that the teachers were exposed to a variety of teaching styles and this was interesting and useful for them.

4. Preparation and distribution of the advertisement for the course

Following the decision on the course dates and times, an advertisement for the course was prepared (see Appendix 2) and distributed to various lists via e-mail. Also, flyers that advertised the course were placed in various departments in the University of Manchester and a specific e-mail was sent to the Language Centre of the University of Manchester. In addition, the advertisement was sent to the British Council offices around the world. It was also sent to committee lists of established organisations in language teaching such as IATEFL, and to communities like Webheads in Action. It was also distributed through social networks like Twitter,



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Facebook and Nings. Within a few days there were more than 20 teachers who e-mailed the AVALON team at Manchester to show interest in the course. By the time the course started we had received an e-mail of interest from around 85 teachers. The complete anonymous profile of applicants can be found in Appendix 3.

5. Selection of teachers

The selection of teachers was conducted by the Manchester team. The criteria for selection were,

1. Teachers who have taught for at least one year,
2. Teachers who were fairly new to Second Life,
3. The selection of teachers demonstrating a variety of languages being taught (not only English teachers),
4. There being some representation from teachers who taught minority languages/ taught in hard to reach places/ who taught students who would not be typical students (e.g. old people),
(We were able to take on only one teacher who satisfied this criteria. This was a teacher who was teaching Sami in Sweden)
5. Teachers should be teaching in Europe,

Based on the above criteria we selected twenty teachers and placed another ten teachers on a reserve list. E-mails were sent out to these twenty teachers immediately after the selection process asking them to confirm whether they would be able to commit to this course (see Appendix 4). The e-mail asked teachers to confirm their acceptance on the condition that they would be able to attend all the sessions for the duration of the course. There were a few teachers who were not able to fulfil this commitment and they were replaced by other teachers from the reserve list. Teachers who confirmed their commitment were then asked to complete a pre-course questionnaire and they were also asked to check-in with Heike Philp for an induction to Second Life if they had never visited Second Life before or if they felt that they needed a basic induction. Seven teachers participated in the induction and during the induction two teachers' computers were identified as not supporting Second Life. They were given a chance to find solutions for their technical problems but these two teachers had to drop out before the course started because their computers were not able to meet the technical criteria for the use of Second Life. Two other teachers were then asked to join the course from the reserve list.



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6. Profile of teachers

Due to two teachers dropping out during the course, there were eventually 18 teachers participating. A detailed (anonymous) profile of the 18 teachers who completed the course can be found in Appendix 5.

7. Finalising of Moodle

Once the tutors were confirmed and the time schedules for the course was completed, Moodle was updated and teachers were given the link and asked to introduce themselves either by writing in the discussion forum or by creating their personal profiles. All the participating teachers, tutors, and everyone involved in the development of the course entered information on Moodle about themselves. The final version of Moodle before sessions started included the aims of the course, weekly content of the sessions in terms of the skills and theory that would be covered in each session, a discussion forum linked to each topic, links to resources related to language learning and teaching in Second Life as well as links to access support for using Second Life. A theoretical framework for conceptualising teaching and learning in Second Life was developed as part of the course (see Appendix 6) and tutors were asked to encourage teachers in their respective groups to read these theoretical conceptualisations with a view to discussing them in their classes and to using the conceptualisations to underpin their presentations at the end of the course.

The weekly content of the sessions were uploaded to Moodle each week. The feedback from teachers after the course was that they would have preferred to have had all the sessions uploaded in advance of the course and not in instalments.

8. Meeting of course tutors before the start of the pilot

Just before the start of the pilot, a meeting was arranged between tutors so that they could meet each other and the developers of the teacher training course (Susan Brown, Gary Motteram, Zeynep Onat-Stelma). In this meeting tutors talked about the course content and discussed types of activities they could use especially in the first two sessions. The tutors



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also agreed to meet each other to prepare each session and to arrange these meetings as appropriate to their schedules.

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