

## Second Life Project: Final Report

Trevor Holmes, University of Waterloo with:

Giulia Forsythe, Brock University

James Humphreys, Seneca College

Cynthia Korpan, University of Victoria

Alice Macpherson, Kwantlen University College

Mark Morton, University of Waterloo

Nick Noakes, Hong Kong UST

Maureen Wideman, University of Ontario Institute of Technology

### Project purpose and overview

The purpose of the project was to explore the possibilities afforded by the virtual environment Second Life as a meeting space and work space for educational developers across Canada and around the world who otherwise would not have opportunities to meet directly. The Educational Developers Caucus grant in the amount of Can \$2500 supported the work, and the budget was spent according to plan (see appendix A). The project was delayed by one academic term due to the principal investigator's change of location and the ethical review needed to carry out the research at the new location.

A call for participants was circulated (Appendix B) seeking up to six volunteers who would become co-investigators along with the Principal Investigator from Waterloo and the Kwantlen Co-investigator. Initial response was actually much stronger than anticipated; including Holmes and Macpherson, fifteen people expressed interest in joining the project. The Research Assistant made sixteen. Two people reconsidered before beginning once the time commitment was reiterated. The project began in earnest in March 2008 with fourteen participants including the Research Assistant and the two original investigators. As time passed and meetings were held, those who had good intentions but who could no longer commit dropped out, leaving us finally with the original two investigators and six participants (the Research Assistant had by then completed his term and our new one did not participate in-world).

Of these eight, most completed reflections as we went and final reflections at the end. We used a wiki to collaborate on the writing side of the tasks. We continue to be in contact and plan to collaborate on future writing projects related to our time in Second Life. See "Next Steps" below.

### Facts and figures

Attendance

Meeting Date	Attended	Meeting Date	Attended
Feb 19	10	May 27	6
Mar 27	6	Jun 16	6
Apr 17	4	Jun 24	2
Apr 22	2	Jul 17	4
Apr 29	5	Jul 24	5
May 6	Cancelled		

## Highlights of reflections

### Recommendations for EDC

At this time, our experiences suggest that Second Life is not the platform for large-scale collaborations or permanent presence by EDC as a formal body. It may be the right platform for small-scale, limited-time and limited-scope projects undertaken by people who are comfortable learning new technologies (early adopter orientation). As educators have noted already, educational developers have found that specific task completion in a mentored apprenticeship model is the most appropriate mode of teaching/learning in Second Life at this time. We do not recommend spending money on a permanent plot of land in Second Life, although we encourage interested educational developers to go into the environment and experiment safely within the areas already built by people friendly to our community (Boracay Island owned by Nick Noakes, Hong Kong; UOIT's island; Loyalist College are all examples). Those brand new to the platform are encouraged to contact one of the co-investigators listed at the end of this report to have a "buddy" in-world.

### Next Steps

It would be desirable to finish some of the ideas generated by the group, but it seems at this juncture doubtful that we can devote time, energy, or money to such a project.

The collaborative writing projects or presentations that resulted from this 4-month experience include:

- interactive presentation of our process and products in-world and/or on a poster at
  - EDC 2009 (see Abstract, Appendix C)
  - STLHE 2009

Further work could potentially include:

- An investigation of the rhetoric of text chat for meetings in relation to embodied virtual space
- An investigation of the perception of slow-moving meetings compared to the timed transcripts of both SL and face-to-face ED meetings
- What happens when we add Voice Chat to meetings?

### Appendix A: Budget

Item (including any applicable taxes)	Cost	Actual
Salaries including all benefits	\$16000	
(Staff time includes 10% of salary/benefits for 12 months)	\$ 8000 x 2 = 16,000	

One undergraduate or graduate Workstudy student	\$ 1800 Fall/Winter Semesters	
Materials, resources and supplies	\$ 600 rental fees in SL \$ 100 phone charges / supplies	
Total Costs	\$18500	
Less matching funding obtained from other sources (e.g. Department/Dean)	We will be seeking funding for related work in September or January, if available from Provost's Learning Enhancement Fund to support the construction of tools and buildings in SL	
Less in-kind contributions	\$16,000 (Staff time; not fundable by grant so contributed in-kind)	
<b>Total amount requested from the EDC Grant Program (not to exceed \$2500)</b>	\$2500	

#### Appendix B: Call for Participants

An invitation to educational developers: Join us in Second Life for a project sponsored by ED Caucus!

We are seeking a limited number of co-investigators to join us on a journey of collaboration from January to May 2008.

#### Criteria:

1. Availability to meet virtually once every two weeks in Second Life at a mutually convenient hour, and exchange emails in between.
2. Commitment to writing and sharing guided reflections about the processes and (short) projects we choose, as a group, to undertake.
3. Access to appropriate hardware and software (see website below for information).

No prior knowledge of Second Life is required (we will peer mentor each other as we go). Educational developers from any career stage are welcome to join us. Please see further details on the project phases below, and further details about Second Life system requirements at this address:

<http://secondlife.com/corporate/sysreqs.php>

Please write to Trevor Holmes, [tholmes@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:tholmes@uwaterloo.ca) with expressions of interest.

Project phases:

Phase 1: orientation and brief project

We will prepare ourselves by ensuring a basic level of navigation and tool use in Second Life and circulating an agenda before we meet in-world. We will choose a simple project that is achievable within one month (either building a site or building a simple resource). During and at the conclusion of this phase, we will journal our reactions to the process.

Phase 2: community of practice project

We will decide as a group what can be accomplished in two months that would serve the broader EDC and worldwide developer community in terms of professional learning space and/or resources in-world and build them. During and at the conclusion of this phase, we will journal our reactions to the process.

Phase 3: gathering, understanding, and dissemination

After the first two phases are complete, we will survey ourselves on the pros and cons of Second Life as a collaborative workspace compared to others with which we may be familiar (teleconference, blogging, wikis, videoconference, live meetings), share our journals within the group, and write a collaborative report that includes recommendations for further uses of Second Life in the Educational Developer community. This report will be made available on the STLHE website and/or the ED Caucus wiki site.

Appendix C: Abstract, EDC 2009

- a) Abstract: In 2008, eight educational developers experimented collaboratively in the virtual world Second Life (SL). This session shares results and poses further questions. Although a growing number of educators have worked in – and evaluated -- SL for teaching and for action research, we wanted to test the platform for our own professional development, and explore the differences this immersive environment might make to our practice as teaching developers. While the interactions and reflections were of great value, we found ourselves questioning whether to recommend that SL be adopted specifically for our internal community of practice. After a brief overview of the project, participants in our session will see an example of what we did and where in SL, discuss in both real life and in Second Life (via one of the presenters, who will be in-world relaying the questions to other offsite members), and offer their own suggestions about EDC-specific applications.