

South East Grid for Learning – Second Life pilot project 2008-09 Final Evaluation

Executive summary

This report details the main findings from the 9 months collaboration between SEGfL and the Open University. It provides a summary of the interest, take-up and engagement of schools, staff and students throughout the project. It also considers some of the barriers and key successes. The final section discusses the potential for any future projects.

Introduction

This project was proposed and agreed at the SEGfL content development group meeting in June 2008. A budget of £5,000 was allocated. After an in-depth debate at Steering Committee it was decided that the project should go ahead. The genuine issues of e-safety were at the forefront of the concerns about becoming involved in such a project.

Read the initial proposals here – [proposal 1](#) and [proposal 2](#).

Publicity/Contacts

A Second Life project microsite was established early on in the life-cycle of the project. <http://www.segfl.org.uk/microsites/secondlife>

The process

After a meeting at the Open University on 21st September it was agreed that SEGfL would collaborate with the OU by encouraging schools to become involved in the OU's existing Second Life teen island - Schome Park. This experiential learning environment was part of a wider approach to learning entitled Schome – *'Not school - not home - schome - the education system for the information age.'* www.schome.ac.uk.

Potential schools were initially identified by members of the SEGfL ICT content development group. Advertising on the SEGfL website and in the newspaper also brought certain other schools on board. Flyers were produced for teachers - www.segfl.org.uk/microsites/library/1214662100/get_a_second_life.doc and students - www.segfl.org.uk/microsites/library/1214662056/want_a_second_life_pupils.doc

Having identified a small working group of staff, the next step was to organise an online flashmeeting. This first flashmeeting can be viewed at - <http://flashmeeting.e2bn.net/fm/fmm.php?pwd=bb9cac-2086>

Flashmeeting was used as a common meeting point for all staff involved in the OU project throughout the course of the project; these meetings were often convened by the OU manager of the Scheme Park project.

A number of teaching sessions were organised with one school in the project. This enabled direct teaching input to guide students into the various projects and activities in Scheme Park.

Students and staff were involved in-world on a range of different projects as well as with affiliated activities on Scheme's [forums](#), [wikis](#), [blikis](#) and personal blogs.

A summary of time spent on Scheme Park activities is shown below.

Outcomes

School involvement

No. of schools/ localities expressing interest	No. of schools/ localities directly involved
12	6

No. of adults directly involved	No. students directly involved
9	26

Staff (Total Hours)		Students (Total Hours)	
Time in-world	Time on wikis/forums	Time in-world	Time on wikis/forums
219	19	277	21

Staff - No. of posts to forum/wiki	Students- No. of posts to forum/wiki
82	85

An in-depth evaluation of one school's involvement in this project can be viewed at - www.segfl.org.uk/microsites/library/1216053136/jh_eval.pdf

General outcomes

Students and staff were involved in a variety of ongoing activities organised by the Scheme Park community.

SEGfL staff built a ship that acted as an origination point/landmark for the SEGfL students. Students and staff also worked on a treasure hunt that was designed to induct new arrivals to the island. As new members worked their way through the treasure hunt they were introduced to significant points on the island and were required to utilise and learn a range of Second Life tools.

Students also managed their own blogs e.g. [Steam's blog](#).

Some students were involved with building different objects e.g. steam engines, railway carriages, formula 1 cars, etc. Others built a working football pitch with stands. Some experimented with scripting objects to move, such as boats and cars.

Machinima

One notable piece of work involved the production of a machinima film based on a true-life historical gothic murder mystery. The Time-travellers' machinima [wiki](#) and [forum](#) provided an online space in which to discuss the ongoing project. The final movie can be viewed at - schomepark.blip.tv/file/971966/.

Teachers TV

In May 2008, Teachers TV filmed part of a 15 minute programme on this project at John Hanson Community school. The programme is due to be aired in September 2008 under the working title of 'This Virtual Life'.

Final thoughts...

Students who were interviewed about the pilot project were clear about the positive benefits of learning within online virtual communities e.g.

'I think Second life is a great source of learning for people.' **Budd Schomer**

'I have enjoyed it very much on Schome Park'. **Steam Schomer**

'I have found Second Life very interesting and so I conclude I think that Second Life is a very good virtual place to go as there are so many things on offer.' **Xiro Schomer**

'My typing is faster and it has improved my spelling it also has taught me a bit of maths because you have to use maths to make the objects that you desire so overall I have learnt quite a lot while learning these skills.' **Monkey Schomer**

There have been clear social benefits for students in terms of building confidence and enhancing self-esteem. Development of IT-based skills has also been relatively easy to demonstrate because of involvement in projects and the legacy of built objects around the island. There is also evidence within the blogs and wikis of higher-order thinking and the ability to engage in mature debates around quite complex issues e.g. seeking permission for building and conforming, or not, to building regulations. One student was directly interviewed for the Teachers TV film entitled 'This virtual life'.

However, what continues to be difficult is how to demonstrate long-term educational benefit. How do skills gained within an online virtual gaming environment transfer to real-life. What curriculum learning has taken place?

The link with the Open University's teen island, Schome Park, has been a genuine success. It has enabled the pilot project to achieve the majority of its initial aims e.g.

- terraforming parts of an island
- involving 30+ students and staff from 7+ schools/settings

- establishing the possibility of opening access to teen second life within the school day and during curriculum time
- demonstrating a range of different kinds of learning for students
- building expertise amongst staff in the SEGfL region

The collaboration with the OU was not without its difficulties. There were inevitable conflicts of interest between staff and students. Rules and agreements that were already in place on the island before the beginning of this project did tend to restrict what was possible. Shome Park had always been a home-based project and therefore the involvement of schools on a more robust 'teaching' agenda also created some tension amongst some of the students and staff. It was particularly difficult to organise any project under the auspices of 'SEGfL' and therefore it was particularly problematic to run sessions that involved SEGfL students and staff as a specific group. Some staff were put off by this in the early stages of the pilot project.

The Future

The success of the Second Life pilot project would suggest that it should continue into a second year. Expertise has been built up amongst a range of staff and students in different schools and an impetus has been established. A number of 'new' schools and settings have signalled their potential interest in becoming involved in a second-year project; in particular where students are not in full-time education or within mainstream settings.

It is unclear at this time what will be the future of Shome Park. Funding continues to be sought to take Shome Park into Phase 4. For this reason it is suggested that SEGfL buy its own island and take sole control for the direction any new project.

Glossary

Microsites – SEGfL mini-websites that are used for project communication and dissemination

Flashmeeting – an asynchronous tool for multi-user video-conferencing – provided free by E2BN – <http://flashmeeting.e2bn.net/>

Blog - a Web site that contains an online personal journal with reflections, comments, and often hyperlinks provided by the writer

Wiki - a Web site that allows visitors to make changes, contributions, or corrections

Bliki - a blog with wiki support.

Machinima - animated filmmaking within a real-time virtual 3D environment