

Australian *Flexible Learning* Framework

supporting e-learning opportunities

Case study > Anangu Inworld > South Australia 2009

Anangu Inworld: An outbush Aboriginal community

TAFE SA Regional - APY Lands

Background

Training organisations face significant issues when delivering course material to regional and remote locations, especially when visiting lecturers are involved. TAFE SA Regional has been using online modes of delivery, including Centra, Elluminate and Moodle, along with face-to-face sessions over the past three years for Interpreting and Business students. After implementing Moodle and Centra as the main means of collaboration between staff, the team from last year was very keen to extend online explorations into Second Life (SL), seeing the engaging, immersive and highly visual nature of that platform as appropriate for Indigenous learners. It was proposed the project build a recreation of an outbush community in SL, where people from communities could come in and roleplay various daily/work situations which involved communicating. The project team also keen to install Sloodle, an interface between Moodle activities and SL, and see how they could benefit training in this virtual world. Aboriginal people in the Lands are usually very perceptive with visual, spatial and aural cues and it was apparent from early ventures with Anangu staff, that this environment could offer a 3D virtual experience as an adjunct to the learning that was happening in the 2D online environment.

The last few years have shown a positive response by course participants to the implementation of online learning for their courses. This has been demonstrated by more regular attendance, enthusiasm and ability to complete course material through additional online support. It is important that this momentum is built on. E-learning projects are enabling TAFE SA to share the possible uses of technology and pedagogy, which embraces flexibility, to other training providers in the Lands and remote Aboriginal communities beyond.

What was done

TAFE SA committed to the purchase of an island in SL in 2008 for an Innovations project, which saw Indigenous trainees rehearse customer service skills inworld. That commitment has continued in 2010 and negotiations began for space early on in the project. Building began in a sandbox area and Sloodle was set up so the tools linked with the APY Moodle site. The project established activities in Moodle, a chat room, choice and quiz activities, presentations and a glossary that could be used by interpreting students when rehearsing legal situations that could allow access to the meaning of various words that might arise in a court or a police interview in SL etc.

Familiarisation with SL proceeded with staff, both Anangu and non-Anangu, and a plan was laid out for out bush community and scenarios which would be suitable and useful for students. When the project began accessing SL in the communities, it encountered some technical issues which persisted for some staff. There is excellent ADSL broadband connection across the Lands making connection to SL possible from all communities.

However, there were problems with some of the staff's computer configuration which needed hands-on information and communication technology (ICT) assistance so this delayed their involvement. The other regular technology problems in the Lands include power outages, frequent in the hot weather, sometime eight times a day, causing frustrating interruptions to all the online platforms. The good thing about working online is that sessions can be rescheduled more easily, more conveniently and the economic ramifications are far fewer than rescheduling a face-to-face session. Also the responsiveness to cultural commitments such as funerals and family responsibilities, which may require people to travel away from the community, can be less disruptive. Participants are beginning to access computers in various places - the beauty of point-to-point, flexible web-conferencing.

As the project progressed, team members conceived of ways that it could use the virtual space to develop skills other than communication in the business certificates and reach beyond the community for e-business possibly with art and music. This worked really well with the mapping of performance criteria against a proposed project of organising an art exhibition in SL. This project-based approach could use the real and virtual worlds for business students to develop a range of skills in a context and will be pursued next year.

The designing and building of the community created a sense of ownership among the team members and many discussions were held which touched on ideas that could be realised in SL eg language maintenance, counselling, driver education in the TAFESA Big City and possible financial issues with SL having a usable currency.

The support and participation of the regional ICT team meant everyone directly involved had no issues with firewalls and connection speed. We worked together from the beginning and this facilitated the process and worked extremely well.

Virtual worlds are still a very new and unknown territory for training in the TAFE sector. Without decision-making management in the organisation having policy guidelines in place for the better part of the year, it made slow-going of negotiating space for the community despite getting on to this quite early. Next time, the project will follow through even more persistently at upper levels of management to ensure minimal delays. There was also a group of people deciding on levels of access etc and team members may have been better served by requesting to be involved in that.

There were also three other projects nationally involved in SL and two of them also looked at Sloodle (Tabor, SA and Gipps TAFE, Vic). The teams worked together sharing knowledge about tools and providing Moodle and SL spaces for trials. This kind of collaboration lends encouragement and builds networks for future work.

In terms of trialling the Sloodle tools, Sloodle Island enabled the project to test and learn how to use the range available and the support of Fire Centaur from inworld facilitated that learning. On TAFE SA Island, the establishment of Sloodle tools was hampered by the lack of high-level access to space in SL so next time it would be advisable to purchase land giving full access.

Benefits experienced by APY Lands TAFESA Regional

The project offered wonderful opportunities for the team to develop skills in this innovative learning environment and consider how the work could be extended into their other training.

The ability to link with websites like the art centres' shops through SL has prompted team members to look at e-business opportunities for artists especially in communities.

Course participants have been enthusiastic about this new virtual learning environment, promoting it to others in the community and encouraging people to come and see the community inworld. It is something they feel quite proud about and are taking some ownership of the space in terms of exploring places that may be of interest to Anangu, suggesting additional features for the environment (like dogs and hunting spots) and exploring ideas for activities and events – inmas/concerts and sharing their language.

SL and virtual world residents, many of whom are education professionals, are fantastic proponents of enhancing learning for their clients by the use of these environments. Generous support through the various web 2.0 networks eg Twitter, blogs and Sloodle Island groups have meant access to relevant technical and pedagogical information through discussion thread and comprehensive video tutorials.

There was a lot of interest across VET and higher education sectors in the use of virtual environments so there have been several opportunities to share our work through conferences both face-to-face and virtual. The project presented at e-Gems, Adult Learning Australia, TAFE and Point of View conferences and attracted a lot of interested people about involvement with the inworld community for their Indigenous learners.

Several of the team members invested a lot of their personal time to become more conversant with the virtual world capabilities and this has meant the expectations have also been exceeded. Plans are in place to develop the program initiated in SL especially with business and community services students. One staff member is studying and has incorporated some of this work into projects on innovative practice for her degree. Towards the end of the project, a working relationship with other faculties in the TAFE sector, namely marketing, were keen to give the project access to the Big City which was built in SL for use with driver education and retail/finance areas.

The outbush community had the surprising outcome of being a virtual refuge for some Anangu participants away from their community. The familiarity of this environment invited immersion with visualisation, which was evoked by realistic surroundings. Individuals who have lived in outbush communities found it easy to navigate their way around and slip into situations, which commonly occurred. The ease of presence along with an eagerness for exploration of other sims by many Anangu gives a great foundation for further learning to occur with this platform.

Lessons learnt

It was important for the team to be involved from the beginning, and the input and diversity of ideas they had really formed the blueprint for how the community inworld looked and what scenarios would be useful from their everyday experience living and lecturing outbush. From early on, staff were inquisitive about the virtual environment, however some were initially unable to connect from their computers because of issues with their computer configuration which has proved difficult for the tech guys to solve.

An early visit to each community by the technical support may have averted some of the connection problems that some staff had in their community. The project had a series of face-to-face workshops in Pukatja, the only place in the Lands with mobile access. This made it possible to use remote broadband so that the team could simultaneously participate in SL. The system struggled if too many people logged on from one spot but access from different locations across the Lands does not cause these issues. It may be helpful to explore satellite connection as a backup for some of the locations.

In large organisations there can be general support for new directions and real commitment in the ownership of space by TAFE SA in SL. It became clear through this project that

contact needed to be made with specific management and groups who had responsibility for decisions regarding process details for land management in SL. When that happened, a long way down the track, the project began an effective working relationship with other key people in TAFESA SL ventures. When pioneering work in a new environment and using new pedagogies the support and collaborative approach is essential from within the organisation and between other providers trialling these modes of delivery.

Working with a team of Anangu and non-Anangu is imperative, especially in this 3D environment. The emergence of new ways of teaching and learning because the platform offers a very different way of 'being' and exploring through fieldtrips to simulated places, allowing both staff and students to access information and connect with people with experience and know-how. This way of learning, where avatars have a 'physical' presence in an actual place and can lead and follow, to show and see, may parallel more closely the traditional way anangu have passed on knowledge. There has been a definite ease in use of SL by Anangu involved and further reflection and discussion on these factors will develop our practice.

The results

A key outcome of the project was the establishment of a new training space in SL which was the recreation of an outbush community. The environment has attracted a great deal of interest from staff and students and the team, consisting of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who have spent many sessions familiarising themselves with SL and designing and trialling activities and roleplays that support learning in the business and interpreting students. The project discovered that body language can be used by the creation of new gestures, which can include audio content. This could offer opportunities to incorporate language for interpreting practice and demonstrate appropriate netiquette and etiquette for various situations.

The project have created notecards to use as a script or scenario prompts for use in the various locations in the community – council office, art centre, clinic, police station, family centre. These included general customer service greetings and queries as well as seeking clarification from clients and handling difficult customers. These notecards will be available in SL for participants to practice. The project successfully trialled the use of the text to speech 'Text Aloud' program, which is installed on all TAFE computers across the lands, for reading the notecards where literacy is adequate. As well as rehearsing and developing communication skills for use in the workplace, plans are well underway to extend the use of this environment for developing skills required for mounting an exhibition of artists' work in the New Year. This has required staff to map performance criteria from the *Business Certificate III* against tasks to be undertaken in organising and curating the exhibition in SL.

Machinima footage has been made of interactions in the clinic and some of the preliminary building sessions. Team members had hoped to film more but found with the delays they were unable to produce good quality videos for wider distribution. They needed more time and tuition than the scope of the project allowed for mastering these skills. One of the team members had experience using Fraps to capture footage, but time did not permit the formation of a film crew for this aspect of resource creation. The project, however was able to take snapshots from inworld and demonstrate the use of the Sloodle tool 'freemail' at *EDayz09*. This tool enables participants to take photos in SL and send them to a blog in our Moodle website.

Sloodle was set up and used between our Moodle and SL. The team had chats between both platforms and discussed ways that would be useful, for instance, if some people were unable to log in to SL, they could still participate in the session through the Moodle chat. The text could also be saved through recording using 'webintecom' from Sloodle. The 'metagloss' tool was implemented using a glossary of legal terms. Interpreting students

need to understand these words and phrases when rehearsing their skills in a legal context. Business lecturers identified terminology that was regularly used in financial areas of business that could also be accessed in SL whilst speaking with 'clients' or organisations about business transactions.

Access to computers for students still very much rely on TAFE staff. All staff were introduced to SL and are competent and supportive with the various online platforms used for TAFE training. This made access more to do with availability, there are a set of four to five laptops at each TAFE campus but these were often in use with synchronous sessions during the week, with Centra being used for business, community services and interpreting. Very few Anangu have a home computer or have access to a computer after hours. The PY Ku Centres have had adhoc access this year due to spasmodic staffing. Transaction Centres and increased home computer ownership are the realistic hope for further involvement with these online platforms, independent of training and work.

Reflections and suggestions

In a recent presentation to an Adult Learning Australia audience, the project facilitator raised the issue of the digital divide that still existed for Indigenous people in remote Australia. Whilst statistics from the 2006 Bureau of Statistics showed that 20% of Indigenous people out bush access the internet, by far the majority of these are from work or school venues, somewhat limiting their exploration of online environments for personal use. However Indigenous people in regional and remote communities are being exposed to the possibilities that online connection can give. In the critical areas of education, health and legal affairs, where information and services like interpreting can be provided, they can begin to be advocates for improved and more affordable internet access. A growing number of young people return to their communities after leaving school, competent and confident users of computers, the internet and multimedia software. There is a new generation of young Aboriginal leaders who want to be role models for those in their communities. Networks like Bebo and Facebook give people a wider audience for their stories and views.

SL can be a platform to showcase the achievements of artists, musicians and educators to a national and international audience. Through this project, connections with First Nation people from the USA were made in SL and participants were able to discuss the benefits and barriers of SL use with Indigenous communities. Other Indigenous communities in Australia have made enquiries about visiting and joining in community events. Outbush communities Australia-wide fundamentally have the same key locations that have been represented in the Anangu Inworld community and thus can enter and relate to this environment. There is a model of delivery that TAFE SA Regional is developing which includes many of the platforms now being used worldwide in VET training (online session rooms, Moodle learning management system, social networking and virtual worlds). This model, with its SL outbush community, could benefit the wider Indigenous community where limited access to computers, the internet and the skills to use them are beginning to be addressed.

The ability to film interactions, conversations and events in SL using Fraps or some screen capture program, presents an opportunity for demos to be made and evidence to be collected for assessment purposes. Role-playing is often used as a mode of assessment and it may be that role plays in SL may provide a valid means of demonstrating skills and processes for certain tasks. This environment may be helpful where real life workplaces are not suitable or as an alternative to explaining things using text or oral communication – someone can show their skills or knowledge in a safe but realistic environment. An example of this is a project by Batchelor and Flinders University in SL for environmental health workers, where students go into a building which has been closed down for health purposes and their task is to investigate and report, using normal procedures and forms, all available from filing cabinets in SL, and come up with their recommendation.

The possibility of a virtual 3D meeting place where people can meet and yarn around fires, listen to bands and view information concerning health and other community services, participate in educational pursuits or cultural maintenance events, from their homeland, is very feasible. Anangu located away from their homeland during this project, made several visits to SL in order to quell their homesickness. This strong connection with place in a virtual representation was unexpected as was the choice of identity by some of the participants. One young woman chose to have an old man as their avatar while others chose to be light or dark skinned and one a bird. Participants can play out roles which may benefit in areas beyond what the project is presently envisaging.

Framework connection

The national training system's e-learning strategy, the Australian Flexible Learning Framework (Framework¹) funds and supports [E-learning Innovations](#) projects which aim to embed e-learning into the national training system by supporting and enabling innovation in training design and delivery, at the state and territory level.

Virtual worlds are really a very new teaching and learning environment so there is room for a lot more research and development in this mode of delivery and learning support. This project has explored the use of creating a realistic environment for people living and working in outbush communities. The various locations are places where VET students will seek employment or are already employed and thus provide opportunities to be shown and practice their skills. Courses covering a wide range of sectors could be adapted to this platform, from broadcasting to driver education, health and community services.

This project has discussed and looked at ways of teaching and learning which offer maximum flexibility. Students can participate synchronously with other participants or asynchronously when they can pace themselves, with access to resource material which can be displayed as notecards, videos and by links to webpages, especially activities set up by lecturers in Moodle. The team have reflected on ways of learning that don't exist in the mainstream classroom and which more closely resemble traditional ways of learning. This may have significance for other Indigenous groups where engagement in mainstream education can often be a challenge.

It has provided some resources and ideas that can be built on; just like this project has built on previous innovations projects from SL. The project has established a virtual training space which can be used by other Indigenous groups and trainers of Aboriginal people in regional and remote communities. From the interest shown by many groups the project would recommend that this space is maintained for use by the wider network. Beyond the community in SL, there are libraries, stages, hospitals, storytelling places which all offer the SL resident and sojourner links to resources, informative live sessions and a form of experiential learning. As a mode of e-learning delivery, it has significant contributions to make to the National Training System and the project has provided a unique training space and a model of engagement through role-playing.

In engaging in this E-learning Innovations project, the following Framework products and resources were used:

- Virtual Worlds²
- Making IT Real³

¹ <http://flexiblelearning.net.au>

² <http://virtualworlds.flexiblelearning.net.au>

- New Practices in Flexible Learning Virtual Worlds – Real learning⁴
- Case studies⁵
- E-Learning Benchmarking – Innovate and Integrate⁶
- The Knowledge Tree⁷
- *Flex e-News*⁸
- Designing e-learning⁹ (role-plays)
- Indigenous Engagement¹⁰
- LORN – communication¹¹

Acknowledgement

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For more information

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³ <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/newpractices>

⁴ <http://virtualworlds.flexiblelearning.net.au>

⁵ <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/casestudies>

⁶ <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/research>

⁷ <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/knowledgetree>

⁸ <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/flexenews>

⁹ <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/designing>

¹⁰ <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/Indigenous>

¹¹ <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/lorn>