

# Give your Professional Development a

# Second Life



By Peggy Sheehy

While most of the attention surrounding education in virtual worlds such as Second Life is focused on student use, I have found another important benefit for those teachers willing to give it a try.

My avatar (online alter ego), Maggie Marat, has been a resident of Second Life since August, 2005. In October of 2006, I opened the first middle school in Teen Second Life that today

is a six-island estate and supports 1,400 student accounts and their teachers. We have addressed every curriculum area, extending concepts, exploring ideas, and demonstrating knowledge. But it has been my uninterrupted Main Grid experience that has provided me opportunities to meet, network, and collaborate with outstanding educators in a global professional learning community. I have developed meaningful, sub-



stantive relationships that carry just as much significance to me as their “real world” counterparts.

The evolution of the international educational presence in Second Life has been nothing short of remarkable. What began as a few bold and curious explorers has now scaled to thousands of teachers spanning over one hundred regions used for educational purposes. Nearly 400 universities around the world teach courses or conduct research in SL, and ISTE, Discovery Star Educators, New Media Consortium, PBS, Google Certified Teachers, ALA, all have a presence in Second Life with more organizations joining us every day.

As our professional development groups in Second Life extend, word is getting out to the mainstream education community that the potential for collaboration is not only more effective and efficient, but it's free! It's also playful, engaging, at times unpredictable and always “on.”

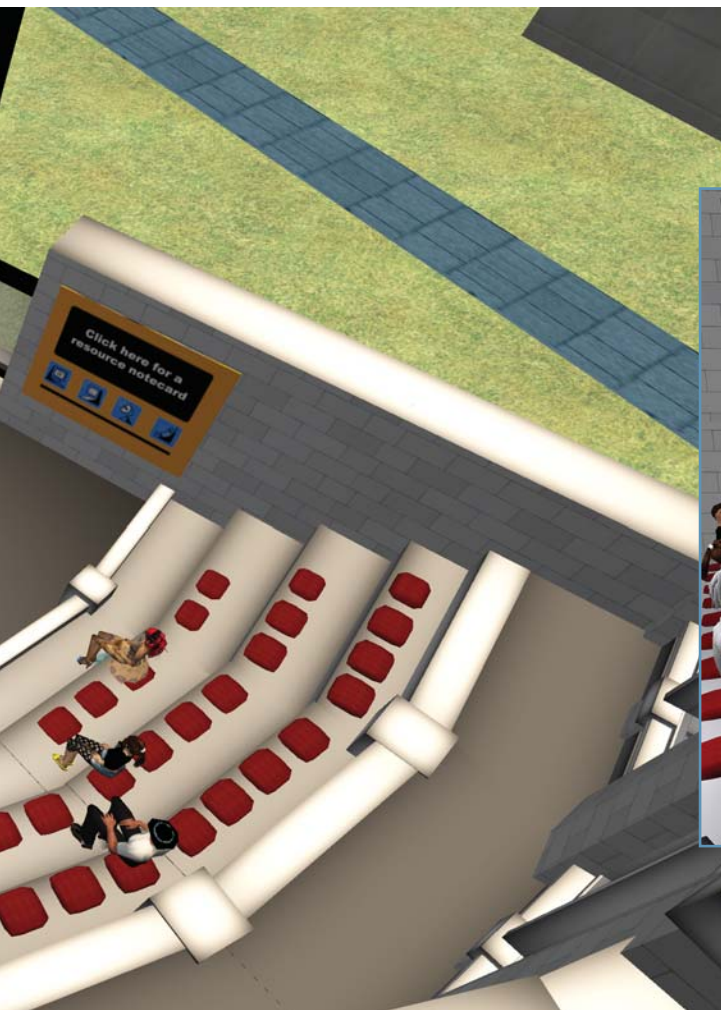
## Second Life Resources

**REZED: Global Kids' Second Life Curriculum is a key component of Second Life professional development opportunities. They cover everything an educator or student would need to know to use Second Life, whether on their own or within an educational setting. ([www.rezed.org](http://www.rezed.org))**

Perhaps the best evidence of this evolution is the attendance at the Second Life Community Convention this year. The education strand has evolved from a tiny cluster of hopeful pioneers (NYC, 2006) to a dedicated ensemble struggling to get their voices heard (Chicago, 2007), to a shining and powerful host of creative, collaborative and unstoppable educators: truly a force to be reckoned with (Tampa, 2008).

What does the virtual landscape offer us absent from other online learning communities? The answer is that sense of presence, the ambiance of place and connection—that feeling of “being there.” Other distance learning vehicles may offer flexible time options but are mostly impersonal. The avatar encounter is highly interactive, and interpersonal, providing the same convenience of not having to travel while extending a richer, more immersive and generally more enjoyable experience.

Understanding that some may find the Second Life learning curve a bit steep, groups such as ISTE have taken measures to ease the way, streamlined the orientation process and even offer support and mentoring within the world to new arrivals. (<https://secure-web6.secondlife.com/join/ISTE/>)



**Be sure to see the machinima (video) from real life educators in SL: [www.knowclue.com/ISTE\\_Collaborative\\_Machinima\\_Project.html](http://www.knowclue.com/ISTE_Collaborative_Machinima_Project.html)**



The ISTE SL membership numbers almost 4,000 members and hosts a Speaker Series featuring prominent members of the international education community. Topics are varied and often the question and answer period afterward lends an opportunity to extend friendship, network and connect with experts in the field. 2008 was wrapped up by fabulous presentations from online safety expert Anne Collier, young adult author Marc Aronson, and digital storyteller Bernajeane Porter. Timothy Magner, Director of the DOE office of Educational Technology visited ISTE for an in-depth discussion of virtual worlds and education.

Other events hosted on ISTE Island are less formal socials, workshops, tours, campfires, storytelling sessions, and even beach parties! (<http://secondlife.iste.wikispaces.net/events>)

These and myriad other opportunities are available to anyone interested with a fairly new computer and an Internet connection. Second Life supports affinity groups for K-12 education, ESL, Special Ed, higher ed, grad students, pre-service teachers, tech teachers as well as groups specifically supporting the needs of every content area from basket-weaving to zoology. The account is free, the community is welcoming, and the possibilities are limitless. So if someone offers you a Second Life, take it. Better yet, go and get one yourself. Get thee to ISTE!

*Peggy Sheehy is an instructional technology facilitator and media specialist at Suffern Middle School in Suffern, NY. After a twenty-five year career as a professional musician, Peggy understands the power of student engagement and established the first middle school educational presence in Teen Second Life: Ramapo Islands. Now in their third year of learning in Second Life, Ramapo Islands hosts over 1400 student and teacher account*

## Other learning communities

### Atlantis Rising Campus: Grand opening January 2009

Welcome to a Second Life for learning! Launching a collaborative venture of creative learning, credited courses, e-resources, and amazing in-world intellectual playgrounds! The courses will bring educators whole new experiences for learning forward into skills, topics, group tools and virtual worlds that are capturing the imaginations of our students.  
<http://atlantisrisingcampus.us/>

### NMC: The New Media Consortium

Launched under the banner of the Educational Gaming Initiative and with initial support from the MacArthur Foundation, the NMC Campus in Second Life has evolved into the largest educational presence in that virtual world, occupying the virtual equivalent of more than 2000 acres.  
[www.nmc.org/proj](http://www.nmc.org/proj)

### DEN in SL

"Connecting teachers to their most valuable resource...each other! The Discovery Educator Network in SL is a global community of educators who are excited by the power of digital media and want to collaborate and share resources with other educators."  
<http://blog.discoveryeducation.com/secondlife/>

### Google Certified Teachers in Second Life

Newly established on Idea City Island, The Google Certified Teachers (GCT) group in Second Life is a group of educators who offer workshops and presentations supporting the use of Google tools for education.  
[www.google.com/educators/gta.html](http://www.google.com/educators/gta.html)

### Virtual Pioneers

Use MUVES to teach social studies  
<http://virtualpioneers.ning.com/>



**An impromptu meeting demonstrated a huge Second Life Education Community show of support for the new Google Teacher Headquarters in Second Life on Idea City Island.**  
<http://slurl.com/secondlife/Idea%20City/179/187/40>