

Taking Teachers Through the Portal

Creating tools to help teachers use Digital Writing within the curriculum

A report of the Writers for the Future in the Classroom project
carried out for NESTA by the trAce Online Writing Centre
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1 Executive Summary

"Kids on the Net is unique in providing hands-on ICT literacy resources that are designed in the classroom and integrated into each classroom with high levels of teacher support. By listening to teachers and students, providing simple but effective tools for digital writing, giving students a moderated publishing space and troubleshooting with teachers, they achieve excellent results in motivating young people to write and improve their writing - not to mention the side benefits of effective use of ICT and developing ICT skills."

Joe Elliott, NESTA Advisor to Writers for the Future

There is a problem in naming the kind of work reported here, in expressing satisfactorily the moving on from writing that can be experienced either in print or in digital form to writing that is uniquely digital - i.e. that can only be read if mediated by a computer. I am calling this Digital Writing and it includes technologies like Flash animation, hypertext and interactive stories, but not, for example, poems or articles that could as easily be read in print, or PDF files - which are just digital delivery of print materials.

I believe that **using Digital Writing in schools has some of the following advantages:**

- Raising achievement:
- Motivating pupils by using technology:
- Developing a modern literacy for a digital future:
- Preparing pupils for the working world:
- Providing new ways for young people to express themselves creatively.

Kids on the Net (www.kidsonthenet.com or kotn.ntu.ac.uk) was one of the earliest websites publishing children's writing on the Web. Over the past eight years it has provided the opportunity for children to publish "traditional" writing such as stories and poems online and respond to and receive feedback from other young people all over the world. Kids on the Net has developed specifically online writing projects for young people to take part in, and has aimed to develop Digital Writing with young people.

The **first Teachers' Portal** was built in July/August 2002 with funding from the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA) as a pilot project. It aimed to provide teachers with real support to use Kids on the Net, and particularly its Digital Writing resources, in their classrooms, while still delivering the current curriculum. The Portal contained a series of resources, based on existing Kids on the Net material, that were directed at stated objectives of the National Literacy Framework for Key Stage 2. It provided information for teachers about digital forms of writing, including hypertext and collaborative online writing, and tools to develop such writing in the classroom and link it to the curriculum.



Writers for the Future in the Classroom was part of the trAce Online Writing Centre's Writers for the Future project (www.writersforthefuture.com), again funded by NESTA, which aimed to promote new media writing or Digital Writing and to provide training and resources for those writers, artists and classes creating the digital works. This action research project also aimed to set out criteria for best practice in creating digital or new media writing.

One outcome of Writers for the Future was the book "Writers for the Future: a Print View" which can be downloaded at www.writersforthefuture.com/news/booklet.htm

Our Digital Teacher in Residence, Simon Widdowson, updated the resources, relaunched the eTeachers' Portal and created two major new projects (Dragonsville and Adventure Island) aimed at both (a) delivering National Framework or other curriculum objectives and (b) developing the use of Digital Writing in the Classroom. The projects were built in accordance with our "access ramp" model to gradually introduce teachers to the elements of Digital Writing through work with direct relevance to the curriculum, taking them from their current skill level to the level required to undertake Digital Writing projects with confidence.

Some of the advantages teachers reported of using the eTeachers' Portal resources include:

- Real publication with a global readership on Kids on the Net;
- The safety aspects of both the eTeachers' Portal resources and the publishing policies of Kids on the Net;
- Interactivity;
- Support for developing teachers' skills;
- The focus on writing as a key skill for visual and multimedia literacy.

The criteria for developing best practice in the creation of Digital Writing in schools and with young people are as follows:

- To guide teachers along the "access ramp";
- To provide sustainable innovative projects for many teachers (and classes) to experience;
- To encourage the development of universal skills for literacy and Digital Writing not software-dependent methodologies;
- To encourage wider publication on the Internet of digital projects produced in schools.
- To keep digital resources relevant to the existing curriculum;
- To provide tools for young people themselves to write for digital media.

When using our Digital Writing projects in class the following should be considered:

- Teachers should ensure they are very familiar with the project and confident in using the digital tools before they begin: **planning is particularly important.**
- Enough **time should be set aside** to do the project justice.
- Teachers may need to **let the children lead** the direction - the pupils may be more *au fait* with online narrative and how digital story works, and how to move it along.
- Classes should **share** their work with the rest of the school, and the wider community.
- **Good technology** and **good technical support** is key
- Enthusiastic teachers need to be **prepared to experiment**;
- There needs to be **enough flexibility** in the curriculum to be creative;
- **Awareness** that ICT is a tool to be used within subjects not a curriculum area separate from the others: and specifically that Digital Writing is concerned with literacy not ICT skills;
- Solid **leadership** with an understanding of how literacy goals can be met with Digital Writing.



2 What is Digital Writing?

When we started this project we at the trAce Online Writing Centre knew what we were studying but we didn't know what it was called. This is an issue that we have been struggling with throughout the past ten years. At first we called it **online writing**, but it clearly included many types of writing that were not online but distributed on CD or DVD, for example. There is still no accepted nomenclature for this type of writing among its practitioners, let alone amongst the general public. It's not even clear whether it is a literary genre or a movement encompassing many art forms including writing. So we tended to call it **new media writing**, but others, in the literary, art and education fields, have called it many things, including:

Computer-mediated writing : Hypertext : active text : web-specific writing : new media work : new media writing : net literature : Net Art : poetry-multimedia installation : web integrated writing : moving poetry : storytelling : multimedia : hypertext poem : net-art-writing : internet based narrative : internet story : hyperfiction : Interactive Fiction : Hypertext Fiction : hypermedia : digital literature : Net-narrative : net-essays : cyberpoetry : digital narrative : Net-specific hypermedia poetry : hypermedia literature : interactive literature : randomly created web narrative : interactive poetry : hyper-essay : Web Poetry : Flash Poetry : multimodal texts : Web projects : electronic literature : web-animated visual poetry : web-based poem : web content - online content : Digital Literacy : Visual Literacy : Digital Storytelling : E-literacy : ICT and literacy : Animated stories

The phrase "new media" has obvious problems - at what point is the medium no longer "new"? - and tends to include some installation and film-related work when used in the context of art. For the rest of this report I will use the phrase **Digital Writing**, because I feel the digital element of the writing is what marks it out as different.

Broadly, Digital Writing is writing that can only be read in digital form using a computer.

This is like the difference between a play and a film: many people just can't see the difference in the media other than that one is live and one is not. However, children today are growing up surrounded by multiple media - including TV, video and DVD, computer games, MP3s, books - they multitask, use technology for communication and subvert it for creative purposes. They are absorbing the processes and thought patterns that are appropriate to these media, and reworking the conventions appropriately. I find that they are much quicker than their elders to think in a nonlinear or multilinear way when they create stories (see Appendix 4).

The writing is digital because computer technology is essential to view it (e.g., a multi-stranded hypertext story like *Adventure Island* can be visualised offline but only properly experienced online), or because the work depends on the network - (e.g., it is produced collaboratively by a group of writers all over the world who could not otherwise be connected: as is the case with *In Search of Oldton*). trAce's *Opening the Space* guide states:

"All new media writings do have at least one thing in common - they must be viewed through the medium of an electronic display, usually a screen but sometimes just audio, via a PC or Mac, a laptop, a PDA, a mobile phone, data projector, or perhaps even a giant outdoor image. Their uniting characteristic is that the computer is an essential component of the writing and without it the work would not exist."¹

¹ *Opening the Space: Guide*, The trAce Online Writing Centre, 2003, <http://trace.ntu.ac.uk/transition/guide/index.htm> (accessed 10th April 2005)



The key technologies of Digital Writing include:

- Movement (e.g., animated poetry in Flash).
- Interactivity (e.g., an instant story where the user enters some words and a story is generated).
- Hypertext (e.g., a branching story).
- Networked texts (e.g., a story where readers add to the text).
- Visual (where the visual is not just an illustration of the text but integral to the work).

Digital Writing may include (where used with creative intent):

- MOOs - virtual spaces in which users create themselves and objects, and interact in real time:
- Powerpoint:
- Blogs (weblogs: where hyperlinks to other sites and/or comments from readers are integral, rather than the type of blog which is merely a journal):
- Community website technologies such as flickr.com (photo sharing), del.icio.us (web bookmark sharing) and wikis (A wiki is a piece of server software that allows users to freely create and edit Web page content using any Web browser):
- SMS & other mobile technologies - many of the features of writing for mobiles qualify it as Digital Writing (e.g., digital technology, networking):
- Web content written specifically for the web utilising hyperlinks and incorporating networked features like comment boards so that the responses of the readers are as important as the original text - something that couldn't happen in the same way to a magazine article:
- Computer games, especially those in which narrative is vital.

Digital Writing does not include:

- Pure communication technologies such as email, ICQ and chat (except where such technologies are used in a creative context, e.g., a drama performance in a chat room):
- Film and video, even digital video:
- Journalism published on the Web:
- Ebooks or any other form of writing where the Web is just the distribution medium and the content could just as easily be read as a book or magazine:
- Writing intended to be printed off the computer:
- Writing produced using digital technologies that does not require computers to view it, e.g., using a word processor or even an online tool to produce a poem that could have been handwritten and which can easily be printed off and read.

eTeachers' Portal screenshot
www.eteachersportal.com



3 Introduction

Where does Digital Writing sit in the broader context of children's digital literacy? Digital literacy and eliteracy are terms often used to refer to children's skills in using the computer and other technologies such as digital video cameras. ICT as a tool can revolutionise the way that children learn to write. I have seen it galvanise children who had not been interested in writing before at all. The next step is to move from using ICT for "traditional" writing - poems, stories and nonfiction as seen in print - to using it to produce actual Digital Writing, using the full potential of the technology. The reasons why teachers and children should get involved with Digital Writing - and its benefits to them - are discussed in this report.



3.1 The educational context in the UK

"I see ICT and its potential to transform how we teach, learn and communicate as crucial to our drive to raise standards. ... we must move the thinking about ICT from being an add-on, to being an integral part of the way we teach and learn in schools." *Ruth Kelly, Secretary of State for Education, January 2005*²

"My vision is one where schools are confidently, successfully and routinely exploiting ICT alongside other transformational measures. By doing so they will be delivering an education that equips learners for life in the Information Age of the 21st century."
*Charles Clarke, then Secretary of State for Education, 2003*³

The education secretary, Ruth Kelly, announced on 12th January 2005 at the BETT educational technology conference in London, a new drive to help every teacher update his or her computer skills. She promised to investigate further ways to help teachers keep up with computer technology and ways of using information communication technology (ICT) in the classroom.⁴

The 2003 Government document *Fulfilling the Potential: Transforming teaching and learning through ICT in schools* proposed a number of common characteristics which the use of ICT either enables or enhances for learners:

"It should mean improved educational outcomes, with higher standards of attainment and the acquisition of important skills such as digital and visual literacy. It should also help to make learning more differentiated and customised to individual needs, and deliver a more engaging, exciting and enjoyable learning process that encourages better learning outcomes, including greater autonomy and emotional resilience, as well as:

- broadened horizons with more opportunities for creative expression; ...
- increased motivation through learning that stimulates, stretches and takes into account prior and concurrent experiences in and out of school; ...
- the ability to make sensible choices about when, when not, and how to use new technologies ...

Pupils who make frequent use of computers enjoy both greater motivation to learn and higher levels of achievement."³

However, there's still a long way to go before most teachers will be using digital resources familiarly and regularly. A May 2004 Ofsted report on ICT in schools found that despite 90% of teachers being rated competent or better by their ICT skills, provision in schools was still patchy. The report said: "The gap between the best and worst ICT provision is unacceptably wide and increasing. In the most outstanding examples, ICT is starting to have a pervasive

² Speech to BETT conference, reported at, e.g.,
<http://education.guardian.co.uk/schools/story/0,,1388869,00.html>

³ *Fulfilling the Potential: Transforming teaching and learning through ICT in schools*. (2003)
<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/ictinschools/uploads/genericdocs/Fulfilling%20the%20Potential.doc>

⁴ *Kelly zeroes in on teachers' computer skills*, Polly Curtis, education correspondent
Education Guardian, 12th January 2005,
<http://education.guardian.co.uk/schools/story/0,,1388729,00.html>



impact on the way teachers teach and children learn. But the quality, diversity and extent of pupils' ICT experiences vary widely between schools."⁵

Curriculum Online is the website "central to the Government's drive to transform teaching and learning in schools by improving access to ICT and multimedia resources for all pupils"⁶. It aims to bring teaching professionals and multimedia resources together and help schools access appropriate resources.

Funded by the DfES and managed by BECTA, the report *ImpaCT2: The Impact of Information and Communication Technologies on Pupil Learning and Attainment*⁷ analysed the relationship between pupils' use of ICT and their performance in national tests and GCSEs.

The report found that ICT is fast becoming an established part of students' learning experiences and is increasingly valued by teachers. By making comparisons between 'high' and 'low' users of ICT, the research shows that in the majority of cases, high users outperform low ones.

We are now reaching the point in time at which teachers are familiar with the technology and pupils are gaining the appropriate ICT skills to move on to the next step: creating Digital Writing. Briefly, I would say that Digital Writing develops pupils' ICT skills while encouraging imagination and creativity. Now that schools have the technology and teachers know how to use it, it is time to use it in more innovative ways to meet curriculum objectives.



3.2 The case for Digital Writing in schools

Two further IMPACT2 BECTA studies^{8, 9} showed that most pupils spend more time with ICT at home than in school. A resource therefore such as Kids on the Net that spans the divide between home and school has many advantages. The third report of the UK Children Go Online Project (www.children-go-online.net) found that 17% of 9-19 year olds had sent pictures or stories to a website.¹⁰

I believe these results show that Digital Writing can offer some of the following advantages:

- **Raising achievement:** the IMPACT2 study showed that at KS2, a statistically significant positive association between ICT and higher achievement in National Tests for English was found at Key Stage 2.
- **Using a computer motivates pupils:** because it involves using technologies, devices and applications that they already love to use in the rest of their lives. It particularly motivates some pupils who are not as motivated to read and write by "traditional" means, e.g., low-achieving boys.

⁵ *ICT in Schools 2004: the Impact of Government Initiatives Five Years On*, OFSTED, 2004

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/index.cfm?fuseaction=pubs.displayfile&id=3652&type=pdf>

⁶ Curriculum Online <http://www.curriculumonline.gov.uk>

⁷ *ImpaCT2 - The Impact of Information and Communication Technologies on Pupil Learning and Attainment*, BECTA, 2002, <http://www.becta.org.uk/research/research.cfm?section=1&id=561>

⁸ *ImpaCT2: Pupils' and Teachers' Perceptions of ICT in the Home, School and Community*, BECTA, 2002 <http://www.becta.org.uk/research/research.cfm?section=1&id=562>

⁹ *ImpaCT2: Learning at Home and School*, BECTA, 2002,

<http://www.becta.org.uk/research/research.cfm?section=1&id=563>

¹⁰ UK Children Go Online survey, Third project report *Active Participation or Just More Information? Young people's take up of opportunities to act and interact on the internet* (published 22 October 2004) <http://personal.lse.ac.uk/bober/UKCGOSurveyexec.pdf>



- **Developing a modern literacy:** children live in a multimedia world, and while Digital Writing is never going to take the place of other writing, it is logical to the multimedia generation that this part of their literacy.
- **Preparation for the working world:** it prepares children for a working life in which digital literacy is likely to be vital.

Digital Writing is still in its early development. It is not even clear yet whether it is a genre or a movement or something completely different. I believe that the stars of this new art form will come from the generation currently in school, the generation brought up with nonlinear, multilinear, multimedia "texts".

Finally, I know that a lot of the children I have worked with agree with the statement on the Curriculum Online website⁶ that using a computer is valuable "because it's fun..."

Creativity has increasingly been recognised in recent years as vital to the individual, to society and to the economy, and initiatives have been formed within and outside the curriculum to ensure that innovation and creativity is nurtured in young people.

"Unless more people leave formal education with an enhanced capacity to engage in, and make an active contribution to, innovation, then much of what we label creativity and inventiveness and entrepreneurship and enterprise will remain unexploited to the detriment of both individuals and society. *David Hargreaves, 2001*¹¹

Various initiatives and organisations are engaged in researching and developing the creative process in schools, including Creative Partnerships¹² and Futurelab. ICT is one of the tools that can be used in this process:

"Creativity can be promoted and extended with the use of new technologies where there is understanding of, and opportunities for, the variety of creative processes in which learners can engage." *Avril Loveless, 2002*¹³

It is clear that digital creative writing can, if the potential is grasped, play a large part in this education for creativity.



3.3 Other digital projects including writing

Based on the working definition of Digital Writing used by the Writers for the Future project (see Section 2) our projects Kids on the Net and Writers for the Future are quite rare. There are not many similar projects in which young people have a real stake in the digital aspects of writing (see later for a discussion of how to give them this stake). Ruth Hammond of BECTA told me "You are offering something quite unusual". Even if Digital Writing projects take place, the results often do not appear publicly on the Internet. I feel that making the writing publicly available for other children, relatives, friends and teachers (and many more) to read -

¹¹ *Towards education for innovation*, David H Hargreaves (Chief Executive, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority), 22 November 2000,

<http://www.harrowtc.org.uk/dt/resources/pedagogy/creativity%20innovation%20Hargreaves.pdf>

¹² <http://www.creative-partnerships.com/>

¹³ *REPORT 4: Literature review in creativity, new technologies and learning*
Avril M. Loveless, NESTA Futurelab, 2002



and to respond to - is a vital aspect of Digital Writing and I will return to this point later in this report.

"There seem to be lots of online maths resources, but I don't find so many for use in literacy and which are appropriate for use with a whiteboard." *Teacher/ICT coordinator, Dragonsville, pilot*

Digital Writing, Gavin Stewart (a participant in WftF) works occasionally with schools to produce writing which is presented in a new media format, e.g., *Habitatiad* (<http://www.gavinstewart.net/cybertext/habitat/habitat7.html>), a "new media poetry experience" celebrating the varied habitats of Stockgrove Country Park, Bedfordshire, a collaboration with Year 3 at Heathfield Lower School. Even in this project, the children's contributions are traditional poems, which can be read in print format as easily as online.

Gareth Pitchford's Flash poems at Edleston Primary School stand on their own as good examples of creating animated poetry in the classroom. See, e.g., *Beans and School*¹⁴.

Other Digital Writing can be seen in projects coming from other approaches, such as:

Game playing: *Adventure Author*¹⁵, a prototype for NESTA Futurelab, is "a game-authoring tool designed to support interactive storytelling skills through the use of game technologies". I'd class this as Digital Writing.

Digital arts: the project *Electric December*, an online digital "advent calendar" (<http://www.electricdecember.org/>) is one of the most successful digital arts projects which involves both artists, communities and young people in groups and schools. It involves writing in its many forms, but the new media aspects are the artists' contributions, so the children themselves are not writing digitally.

Digital storytelling: this term is coming to mean working with digital video, but involves writing in the sense of writing a script. This I'd exclude from Digital Writing because the production processes - while technically digital - owe more to traditional film than to new media practices.

Email projects: for example the Writing Together project *In Person and On-line* with Peter Wynne Wilson in Birmingham¹⁶, during which Peter created webspace for work produced by secondary school children within his own website (www.peterww.co.uk). This webspace became the focus of the residency. It included (and still includes) a 'message board' area for children to post drafts of work and pages for each school (evolving into a page for each student). The website and the work produced are not new media or Digital Writing as such but such a project is still seen by literature organisations and teachers as ground-breaking use of the Internet.

Children's own writing: Most of these kinds of projects are collaborations between young people and digital artists and writers. We are only beginning to see the young people themselves writing in new media. Nonetheless such experimentation is beginning to happen. The UK Children Go Online survey¹⁰ revealed that an amazing 34% of 9-19 year olds using the Internet had created their own websites. All of these involve text and many involve an element

¹⁴ Primary Resources: Online Activities <http://www.primaryresources.co.uk/online/index.htm>

¹⁵ http://www.nestafuturelab.org/showcase/adventure_author/adventure_author.htm

¹⁶ Writing Together 2003/4 *In Person and Online*, Writer: Peter Wynne Willson, Case Study, http://www.booktrust.org.uk/writingtogether/online_cs.html. The work produced can be read at http://www.pwynne.hostinguk.com/writing_together.htm



of creative writing. Fan fiction is a popular pastime, often involving contributing to ongoing linear fictions in a forum environment. These are generally based on popular music groups or films or TV shows popular with teens, such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Lord of the Rings*.

Young people also create interactive stories for one another using web-based tools including publicly available javascripts. To study children's own websites and how they use them to write would be a fruitful area of research. It appears to me from my observations of the way that teens write, that much of this kind of activity takes place in the "Deep Web" (that is, the areas of the Web which are password protected and don't come up on search engines), based in Yahoo groups or MSN groups and publicised by the digital equivalent of "word of mouth" amongst the young people themselves. The sites constantly come and go. One example including both fan fiction and interactive stories is:

<http://www.westlifeweb.com/fans/storycorner.html>

Storytelling with Powerpoint is another way in which teachers are now being encouraged to develop pupils' story writing skills. Powerpoint is favoured because pupils are already required to use it in the ICT curriculum. For an example see *Interactive Stories* from Year 4 at All Saints CE School, Leek, Staffs¹⁷.

I have reservations about the use of Powerpoint for Digital Writing, because Powerpoint is designed for business, not creative use. It requires a lot of skill to use and these skills are not transferable to other programs making it difficult for a young person who develops an interest in Digital Writing to go on to create more complex works. Learning HTML for example is a useful skill and one that can be built on to create gradually more sophisticated works. Nonetheless creative Powerpoint is gaining ground, being used by artists such as David Byrne¹⁸, digital writers and elearning developers as well as young people.



3.4 Kids on the Net background

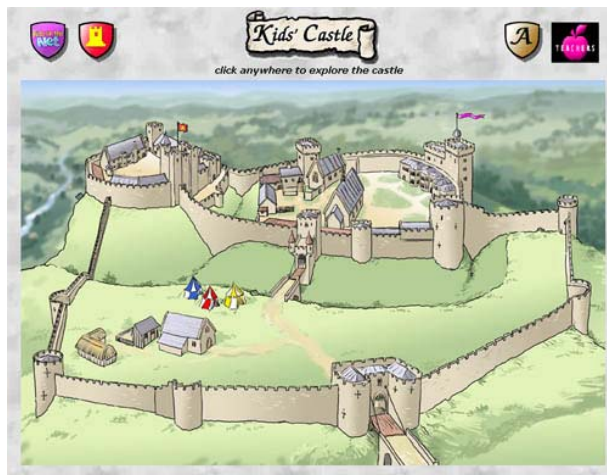
Kids on the Net was founded in 1998 as part of the trAce Online Writing Community (later Centre). It was initially based on a simple model of inviting children at school, home or elsewhere to submit writing in a variety of categories such as Sports, Poems, Stories, or News. I took it over in 1999 with the backing of sponsorship from Experian headquartered in Nottingham. Kids on the Net has always aimed to provide a voice for young people and a place where they can share their thoughts, feelings and opinions with one another.

The feedback facility on the site shows how the young people respond to one another's work and to problems about their lives.

Seeing the potential for collaborative, interactive, hypertext and other writing we went on to develop a range of projects featuring interactive, collaborative and increasingly Digital Writing.

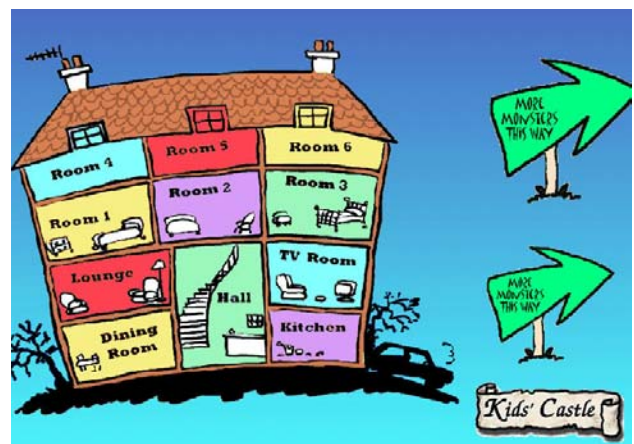
¹⁷ http://www.allsaints-leek.staffs.sch.uk/interactive_stories1.htm, accessed 19/01/05

¹⁸ <http://www.davidbyrne.com/art/eeei/index.php>, accessed 31st March 2005



The specifically digital projects include Monster Motel (below right) - a project which invited children to submit a description (and sometimes picture) of a monster - and Kids' Castle (left) - a fictional but historically accurate castle based on Nottingham Castle in 1480. Students can drag their mouse over the parts of the castle to select and enter sections such as the Royal Apartments, the Chapel, the Great Hall, the Tournament, and more. On entering each section, students learn the history behind the section and then have the opportunity to do a writing activity (with galleries of submitted writing), or other interactivity such as play a word game.

Kids' Castle is still the most successful part of the website: six times as many people enter the site on a Kids' Castle page as enter on the main Kids on the Net homepage (a total of 100,000 visitors entered Kids' Castle in 2004). We have also created the Big 3 Book Award and the Primary Parliament for Nottingham City Council, and The Net Rules! with the Galleries of Justice museum, Nottingham. We have also undertaken school residencies with an emphasis on Digital Writing, e.g., in St Augustine's Primary School and Margaret Glen Bott Secondary School (with funding from Creative Partnerships). Workshops have been held for schools, children's libraries and arts festivals.





Although based in Nottingham, the site has always been international and has young contributors aged from under 5 to 19 from over 140 countries including the Netherlands, Malta, Israel and India. Overall both users and submissions have grown threefold in the two years of Writers for the Future. During the Writers for the Future project, the numbers of UK users of the site have increased hugely (e.g., from 2.72 million hits in 2003 to 4.66 million hits in 2004). This reflects the increased Internet use at home and in schools since 1998. In 2004 the site received a total of 1,150,000 separate visits: over 100,000 hits per day. (Each visitor will “hit” a number of pages during their visit.)

The website is founded on content written by children themselves. As well as using it at school, children use it independently at home or at libraries in leisure time. They use it for developing their own writing, and for learning about themselves and each other. Much of the writing is done in the classroom however, as part of a literacy, English or (often with Kids’ Castle) history lesson. It can often be seen (from the notification emails received when someone contributes to Kids on the Net) that a whole class has contributed to the site and that some of the children have gone home and carried on writing on the site at their home computers in the evening, even bringing their siblings to the site¹⁹. Lucy Barker, one of the winners of the Dragonsville launch writing competition, entered the competition when her younger sister introduced her to the site after using it at primary school.



3.5 Our pilot project funded by NESTA

The first Teachers’ Portal was built in July/August 2002 with funding from the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA) as a pilot project. It aimed to provide teachers with real support to use Kids on the Net, and particularly its Digital Writing resources, in their classrooms, while still delivering the current curriculum.

The Portal contained a series of resources, based on existing Kids on the Net material, that were designed and written by teachers Andy and Barbara Seed (in collaboration with Helen Whitehead of Kids on the Net) to fulfill stated objectives of the National Literacy Framework for Key Stage 2. They included at least one resource for each term in KS2, plus eight fully developed resources and one specially developed hypertext resource along with supporting downloadable information and links to live projects.

The Portal provided information for teachers about new forms of writing, including hypertext, collaborative online writing and other forms of new media, plus resources to back up teaching, and tools to develop such writing in the classroom and link it to the curriculum.

The resources were written by teachers and evaluated by teachers. The evaluations indicated that the resources were appropriate for the classroom, and helped teachers use Kids on the Net as a stimulus for children to write, as a collaborative online writing resource and to introduce the potential of hypertext.

¹⁹ See for example the Foxford School webpage <http://kotn.ntu.ac.uk/diff/foxford.cfm> : Dominic (14) really caught the poetry writing bug and other contributions to the website from Coventry shortly after the workshop were from siblings of the workshopers (personal communication from the school).



The original pilot Teachers' Portal



3.5.1 The “access ramp” model

As part of this pilot project we proposed a model for introducing this work into the classroom and investigated this model in our action research. Teachers readily accept Kids on the Net as an online resource for teaching “traditional” literacy - the crafting of stories, poems and other writing. For example, one of the search terms that teachers use to find Kids on the Net is “personification poems”, covered at least twice in the Literacy Strategy for KS2. Although displayed on the Web, these poems are not Digital Writing in themselves. Using this resource required of the teacher no specialist skills other than using a browser.

We are also acutely conscious of the constraints under which teachers work. The model therefore was designed as an “access ramp” to gradually introduce teachers to the elements of Digital Writing through work with direct relevance to the curriculum, taking them from their current skill level to the level required to undertake Digital Writing projects with confidence.

We aimed to provide a series of projects that would encourage teachers with good ICT skills to explore creative use of these skills in literacy teaching, and to inspire those just starting to use ICT to develop their skills and look “outside the box” towards self-propelled innovation. As part of these projects we intended to provide online tools to make the process of creating a new media project easier for teachers yet adaptable to different skill levels.



4 Writers for the Future in the Classroom

Following the pilot project, the Writers for the Future project, again funded by NESTA, took place over two years from April 2003 to March 2005. It explored innovative ways of writing using the internet and provided criteria for best practice in the emerging genre of new media or Digital Writing.

This challenging action research project included:

- A Digital Writer-in-Residence (Tim Wright) creating innovative literature online²⁰.
- A Residential Workshop introducing writers to technique and appreciation.
- An Online Workshop providing resources, training, support and inspiration.
- An Archive of new media writing developed at trAce since 1996.

Writers for the Future in the Classroom was the education side of the project, which explored the use of Digital Writing in schools. It included:

- A Digital Teacher-in-Residence (Simon Widdowson) developing new media writing/Digital Writing in the classroom.
- A Teachers' Portal providing curriculum resources and support.



²⁰ In Search of Oldton, <http://www.OLDTON.COM/> accessed 13th April 2005



4.1 Aims and objectives of the project

4.1.1 Aims

We aimed to create a Teachers' Portal for the Kids on the Net website, specifically providing resources for teachers about new forms of electronic/Digital Writing, including hypertext, collaborative online writing and other forms of new media.

Our aims were:

- To promote new learning models using ICT for writing and literacy, most specifically with regard to new forms of interactive, hypertextual and visual writing.
- To challenge the focus of the conventional curriculum on print media and to draw attention instead to online, programmable, audio and animated texts.
- To generate an interest in reader development in online writing.
- To develop the skills of children and teachers in online citizenship and collaboration.

4.1.2 Objectives

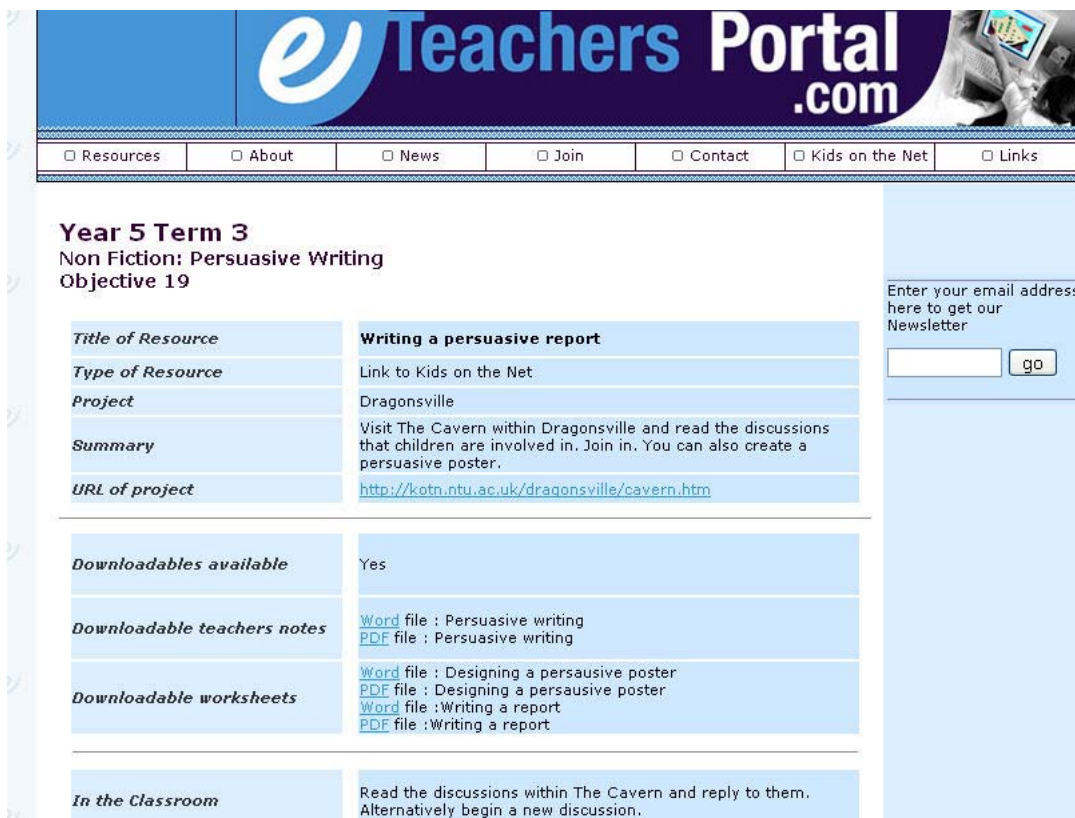
We aimed to inform teachers of the benefits of using new forms of writing in the classroom and to support their adoption and development:

- To offer an envoy, in the form of a digital teacher-in-residence, to work directly in schools on practical online projects. The teacher's role included conducting a series of small experimental online writing projects, creating material for addition to a Teacher's Portal for Kids on the Net, and supporting teachers wishing to develop their skills.
- To initiate the creation of tools for making new kinds of interactive hypermedia texts using a range of applications including Flash.
- To develop an audience model leading to a simple system for badging tools and content according to technical competence and time commitment
- To develop a support and information point for teachers wishing to develop skills and raise standards in using ICT for literacy
- To generate a body of exemplar hypermedia created by children

The resources we piloted in schools have an obvious place in the current curriculum yet attempt to challenge both teachers and pupils to be more creative in using ICT skills, and to introduce them to Digital Writing. We concentrated on a small number of projects that were designed to act as an attractive access ramp for teachers new to the field whilst at the same time providing a range of challenging opportunities for the more sophisticated user. These projects are displayed on the Kids on the Net website but are fully documented and resourced within the eTeachers' Portal (the revamped Teachers' Portal: see section 4.4). The projects remain available for use in schools beyond the timescale of the NESTA project as part of Kids on the Net.



eTeachers' Portal resource page screenshot
www.eteachersportal.com/r05302.htm



The screenshot shows the eTeachers Portal website. The header features the 'eTeachers Portal .com' logo and a navigation bar with links: Resources, About, News, Join, Contact, Kids on the Net, and Links. The main content area is titled 'Year 5 Term 3' and 'Non Fiction: Persuasive Writing Objective 19'. It displays a resource titled 'Writing a persuasive report' with details on its type, project location (Dragonsville), summary, and URL. A table lists available downloadables: a 'Yes' for downloadables, and links for Word and PDF files for persuasive writing, designing a poster, and writing a report. An 'In the Classroom' section suggests reading discussions and replying. On the right, there is a newsletter sign-up form with a 'go' button.

Title of Resource	Writing a persuasive report
Type of Resource	Link to Kids on the Net
Project	Dragonsville
Summary	Visit The Cavern within Dragonsville and read the discussions that children are involved in. Join in. You can also create a persuasive poster.
URL of project	http://koton.ntu.ac.uk/dragonsville/cavern.htm

Downloadables available	Yes
Downloadable teachers notes	Word file : Persuasive writing PDF file : Persuasive writing
Downloadable worksheets	Word file : Designing a persuasive poster PDF file : Designing a persuasive poster Word file : Writing a report PDF file : Writing a report

In the Classroom	Read the discussions within The Cavern and reply to them. Alternatively begin a new discussion.
-------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

4.2 Methods and practice

The core team comprised Helen Whitehead, Project Manager, and Simon Widdowson, Digital Teacher-in-Residence. They were supported by the Writers for the Future team at trAce, Sue Thomas, Simon Mills and Catherine Gillam, and advised by Joe Elliot, our NESTA-appointed advisor, and a Teacher Tools Advisory Group (TTAG), which met six-monthly, either in person or virtually, to advise on the direction of the project and trouble-shoot any problems and issues. The TTAG included teachers, education experts and consultants. (For full membership see end of Appendix 1).

In line with the "access ramp" model described above (section 3.5.1), we decided at the start, on the advice of the Teacher Tools Advisory Group, that

"one of the key issues is to encourage teachers to want to use the web as a tool. The general opinion is that teachers are apprehensive as they assume that children are more computer literate than they. ... At the same time it is not desirable to spend a great deal of time and resources on developing basic IT skills in teachers. *In short, the emphasis is not on how to use IT, but rather how IT can be used.*"²¹

²¹ Minutes, TTAG meeting, 30th June 2003



4.3 Teacher in residence: Simon Widdowson

Simon Widdowson was employed as Digital Teacher-in-Residence, part-time only from September to December 2003, then full-time from January to the end of August 2004. He was supported by Helen Whitehead and, for Adventure Island, by Simon Mills. Simon Widdowson revamped the eTeachers' Portal resources, planned, created and piloted the online projects in schools, coordinated the evaluations, and liaised with TTAG, teachers, consultants and other organisations, including giving talks to various groups of teachers at conferences and training days. He maintained a blog of his activities (see screenshot below).



Simon reassessed and reframed (where necessary) all the resources from the original NESTA-funded pilot project (see Section 3.5), adding information on teacher skill levels required and hardware and software resources needed. The original resources were indexed only by National Literacy Framework objective so we added extra indexes to allow teachers to also search for resources by genre and project, etc. (See Appendix 5 for an example of a resource.)

Simon then produced a series of new teaching resources and tools using our "Access Ramp" model. These were associated with two major new themed projects (see page 19 for screenshot of the resources page for Dragonsville). He used Flash, Hot Potatoes, Javascript and HTML and Cold Fusion to produce online literacy activities that reinforced literacy skills relevant to Digital Writing. These include interactive cloze activities, Flash-based tools to design posters, crosswords, and quizzes on similes and metaphors with associated interactive stories²². For screenshots of some of these, see page 20.

²² see, e.g., Dragonsville Quiz section <http://www.dragonsville.com/quiz.htm>



Index of resources for Dragonsville screenshot
<http://www.eteachersportal.com/dville.htm>

The screenshot shows the eTeachers Portal website. The header features the 'eTeachers Portal .com' logo. Below the header is a navigation bar with links: Resources, About, News, Join, Contact, and Kids on the Net. The main content area is titled 'Index of resources for Dragonsville'. It includes a note about the Flash plugin, a section on 'The premise' of Dragonsville, a section on 'The Rock of Knowledge', and a section on 'The Cave of Fame'. On the right side, there are three categorized resource lists: 'Fiction' (Year 3 Term 2: Writing a character portrait), 'ICT skills / new media writing' (Ongoing: Hyperlinking documents together), and 'Non-fiction' (Year 3 Term 3: Writing letters and Year 4 Term 1: Writing Instructions). Each list includes a folder icon, a title, a curriculum objective, and a set of icons representing different document types.

Index of resources for Dragonsville

NOTE: Some activities require a plugin program called Flash™ to be installed on your computer. Ask whoever is in charge of the computer to download it safely for FREE by [clicking here](#).

The premise
Dragonsville is a community of dragons who live close to Kids' Castle (another project within the Kids on the Net website). The dragons of Dragonsville are friendly, yet shy dragons who have avoided contact with humans until now. Since learning that the knights of old had spread untruths about them, they have decided that they need to show children how friendly they really are and so have made the decision that it is time to allow children into Dragonsville.

Within Dragonsville there are several sections that encourage children to produce literacy work. Each has been designed to fulfil at least one curriculum objective to fit with teachers' termly planning.

[Further info on curriculum links is available in our eTeachers' Portal](#)

The Rock of Knowledge
This is an area where the dragons go to find out information. Children are encouraged to research and present information in this area. Example application: The NLS framework for Year 3 term 2 (Instructional writing), Year 4 term 2 (Explanation), Year 5 term 2 (Non Chronological Reports and Explanation) and Year 6 term 2 (Notices and Public Information Documents) can be linked into this area.

The Cave of Fame

Fiction
Year 3 Term 2
[Fiction: Writing a character portrait \(Objective 8\)](#)

ICT skills / new media writing
Ongoing
[Hyperlinking documents together](#)

Non-fiction
Year 3 Term 3
[Non-fiction: Writing letters \(Objective 20\)](#)
Year 4 Term 1
[Non-fiction: Writing Instructions \(Objectives 25, 26\)](#)

The Adventure Island project gave teachers a tool to create various types of hyperlinked narratives on the theme of a desert island - without needing web skills.

Simon held workshops for children and teachers all over the country (plus - virtually - in 5 schools in USA and Israel over the Internet), including workshops in 8 schools in the Dragonsville pilot and 7 more in the Adventure Island pilot. He spoke to more than 200 teachers and emphasised the importance of cascading the knowledge to other teachers in the same schools and other schools.



From Dragonsville - Cloze activity - The Winter Dragon
www.dragonsville.com/winter.htm

<< Index **The Winter dragon - part one** Part two >>

It was a cold, crisp January morning in Dragonsville. The air was still and a light fall of [?] was covering the [?] turning it into a smooth white blanket. Julie and Ahmed had arrived at the archway, but the [?] were nowhere to be seen. They didn't like the cold and snow. It made their wings freeze, and every time they took a [?] there was so much steam that they could not see where they were.


Just beyond the Cave of Fame a faint [?] of smoke was rising. Julie pointed towards it and both her and Ahmed began to [?] around the cave to see what was burning.

From Dragonsville - Flash activity - Design a lost dragon poster
www.dragonsville.com/poster3.htm

Dragonsville >> Naming Pool >> Design a Poster >> Flash activity

Designing a lost poster

Instructions



Copyright Kids on the Net 2004. Part of the Writers for the Future project

Enter title here

name of dragon

Description of lost dragon
can be added here (50
letters maximum)

contact details and reward written here
(50 letters maximum)

[Print](#)



Everywhere Simon (and myself) spoke, we challenged the focus of the conventional curriculum on print media and drew attention to the potential for writing with new technologies.

"It was so inspiring to see someone else working with ICT in the classroom: it was very helpful for informing my own practice. The visit from the Digital Teacher was mentioned in our OFSTED report."

Caroline Stamp-Dod, Millfield

"Simon's workshops added to the 'wow' factor with the children - they felt they were doing something really special (which, of course, they were)."

Laura Pearce, Folkestone



4.4 The eTeachers' Portal

4.4.1 The relationship between the eTeachers' Portal and Kids on the Net

Originally the Teachers' Portal was a sub-site of Kids on the Net, but as Writers for the Future project progressed, we realised that to serve teachers properly the Teachers' Portal needed its own identity and we created a domain - eTeachersPortal.com - with its own logo and identity. The reasons for this were:

- **Teachers' needs** - for resources that clearly address the skills that pupils need and the objectives of the existing curriculum - are separate from those of young writers at whom Kids on the Net is aimed - to whom we offer help and encouragement with writing, the opportunity to be published and feedback from peers and guides. Resources for teachers are not necessarily a subset of the Kids on the Net projects (primarily aimed at children themselves) but sit alongside.
- **Encouraging Digital Writing** involves also looking at projects beyond Kids on the Net. If future development is possible, the eTeachers' Portal should be a portal to Digital Writing in schools, not just to Kids on the Net itself.
- The **look of the site** should be different as it is aimed at teachers and consultants (adults) rather than children. Teachers who search the Web will get more from arriving at the eTeachers' Portal than arriving directly at Kids on the Net.
- The **two sites work alongside one another** with clear links but separate purposes.

The eTeachers' Portal developed throughout the project - starting as a portal to the resources in Kids on the Net and taking steps towards becoming an information point and network for teachers wishing to develop skills and raise standards in using ICT for literacy and writers and others involved in this kind of work.

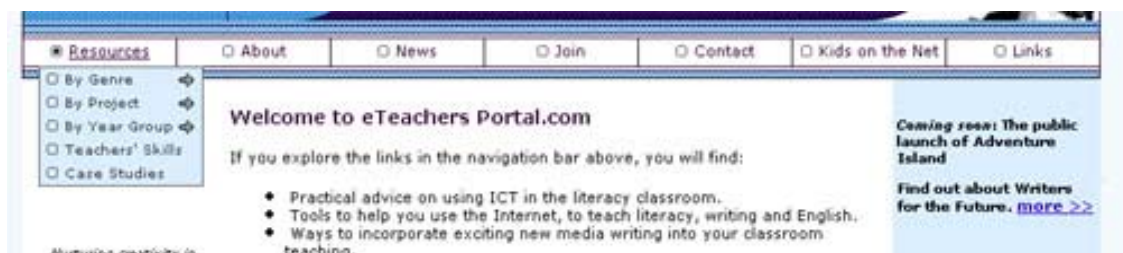
The final version of the eTeachers' Portal website, the beta version of which launched in February 2005, aims to give it a professional look and focus it on teachers and consultants rather than children. It promotes new learning models using ICT for writing and literacy, by providing resources, linked to the curriculum, and with a focus particularly on new forms of interactive, hypertextual and visual writing, i.e. Digital Writing.



Final version of eTeachers' Portal website
www.eteachersportal.com



4.4.2 The structure of the eTeachers' Portal



From the homepage, the eTeachers' Portal is divided into several areas.

The most important is Resources, which can be accessed by Genre (fiction, nonfiction, poetry, etc.), by Project (Dragonsville, Kids' Castle etc.), or by Year Group, Term and National Literacy Strategy Objective. In this section there are also a few resources addressing teachers' skills, and some case studies of the use of Kids on the Net and its projects in school, as well as links to case studies of other Digital Writing projects.



The resources are all in the same format, giving information on the type of resource, a brief description, curriculum links, information on how to use the resources in the classroom and, if available, links to related downloadable teachers' notes and worksheets.

The resources section also includes case studies of the use of Kids on the Net and eTeachers' Portal projects in school: we expect that other case studies of digital writing will be added.

4.4.3 Content of a typical resource

Year 3 Term 2

Fiction: Myths, legends, parables & fables

Objective: Whole Term

Resource Title	Monster Motel
Type of Resource	Online Resource
Project	Monster Motel
Summary	Here is an imaginary house full of monsters created by children: there are descriptions of hundreds of monsters, which inhabit the various rooms. There is also a monster menu with recipes for the disgusting dishes on offer.
URL of project	http://kotn.ntu.ac.uk/motel/
Downloadables available	Yes
Downloadable teachers notes	Word file PDF file
Downloadable worksheets	Word file : Monster Portrait PDF file : Monster Portrait
In the Classroom	Write a portrait character of a monster to feature in a myth etc. Base a revamped traditional tale on a monster from the motel.
Online activities, instructions or forms	Send poems to the site using the form provided
URL of online activities	http://trace.ntu.ac.uk/kotn/motel/submit.html
Summary - extended information in notes or worksheets	Write an instant monster story online
Extension activities URL	http://trace.ntu.ac.uk/kotn/motel/interactive2.htm
Linked activities	Write traditional recipes in the Kids' Castle Kitchen Create character portraits for characters in Kids' Castle
Keywords for extensions: special needs	KS1 - Choose a monster out of a well known story or fairy tale and produce a group character portrait
Adaptations for different age groups and abilities	KS2 - Create detailed character descriptions of monsters in stories that have been read Art & Technology - Create pictures or 3D models of monsters
NLS framework objective (Year)	3
NLS framework objective (Term)	2
NLS framework objective (Number)	Whole Term
NLS framework objective (Name)	To generate ideas relevant to a topic by brainstorming, word association, etc To investigate and collect sentences / phrases / for story openings and endings: use some formal elements in retelling and story writing To collect suitable words and phrases, in order to write poems and short descriptions; design simple patterns with words, use repetitive phrases, write imaginative comparisons
Year group(s) UK - Starting Year group range	3
Ending year group range	6
Curriculum Links	English, Literacy, Technology, Art
ICT Skills	Word Processing Webforms
Teacher experience level	Basic
Length of time required	Several lessons

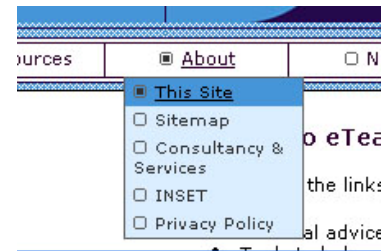


4.4.4 Other areas of the eTeachers' Portal

The other areas of the eTeachers' Portal are:

About

This gives information about the eTeachers' Portal, and about the consultancy services we offer, such as workshops for children or INSET for teachers.



News

There are two aspects to the news - (1) a news feed from the NGfL (National Grid for Learning) - in fact we were the first website to offer this new feature when the NGfL first offered it - and (2) a blog, or weblog, of news about the eTeachers' Portal and Kids on the Net and any other news of relevance to digital writing in schools.

We chose to use a blog because it is easily updated and can be maintained after the project finishes, giving the eTeachers' Portal an ongoing aspect that would otherwise be lacking without further funding.

See page 25 for an example screenshot from the News blog.

Join

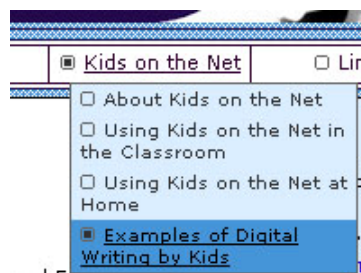
This provides a link to sign up for the newsletter, and information about volunteers.

Contact

Full address and contact details - limited to this one place so that the email address is not spread over many pages, the advantages being that it is easier to change if necessary and less likely to be picked up by email-harvesting spam bots.

Kids on the Net

A link to Kids on the Net and general information about that website and how to use it in the classroom.



Links

A page of links to parts of the trAce website, the Kids on the Net website, and other websites of relevance to digital writing with young people. This section has the potential to develop into a reviewed sites section.



Example screenshot from the eTeacherblog
<http://www.eteachersportal.com/blog/index.html>

4.4.5 Evaluation of the eTeachers' Portal

Some of the advantages teachers reported of using the eTeachers' Portal resources include:

- **Real publication with a global readership:** The connection with Kids on the Net allows the children to publish their work on a website which has a global reach - this is real publication, unlike on schools' own websites or LEA intranets with limited reach.

"The children took work home and their parents got involved. They could show their work to Auntie Vera, even if Auntie Vera lives in Australia."

Richard Clark, Dragonsville pilot, Porchester Junior School

"One thing that gives new media writing its strength is its audience. It can invite broader participation, in a global context. Also the competitive element of being published online encourages children to write as well as they can."

Keith Harrison, Porchester Junior School



- **The safety aspects** of both the resources and the publishing policies of Kids on the Net are appreciated (we edit all submissions before publishing them). We moderate all submissions and edit them:

1. to ensure no personal details are published such as children's email addresses, or phone numbers: the rule of thumb is not to include any information that might identify the child or anyone they write about in real life.
2. to check for appropriate language - a lot of abusive messages are posted on the site by unsupervised young people
3. to edit for spelling and grammar - capital letters seem to be a problem for young typists!

Many schools appreciate the anonymity of Adventure Island in particular: children's names need not be included at all and a pseudonym can even be used for the school itself on the website (although we insist on knowing which schools are involved for record keeping).

- **Interactivity** - In the pilot stage users appreciated getting replies back to some of the questions asked, taking part in the creation of a branching story with voting for the best next chapter, and entering the competition. Several teachers commented on the improvement in self-esteem and confidence in writing of individual children who took part in these activities.

"I just wanted to thank you for running the Dragonsville competition, which one of my pupils won. It has galvanised her writing and that of her friends. They're so much more enthusiastic now about writing."

Drew Boddy, teacher, Royal Masonic School for Girls, London

- **Support for developing teachers' skills.**

"I would definitely recommend this project because it is an excellent means of professional development without leaving school! A real advantage is that it is so well supported."

Judy Johnson, West Twyford

- **The focus on writing as a key skill** for visual and multimedia literacy.

"One of the temptations of flashy sites is that the quality of the writing is not the focus - the accoutrements of graphics and technology are. A particular advantage of Kids on the Net and its projects is that it foregrounds the text and the writing - if I'm teaching writing it's the text that's important."

Keith Harrison, Headteacher

4.4.6 Usage of Kids on the Net and the eTeachers' Portal

- The number of visits to Kids on the Net increased from 801,000 in 2003 to 1,150,000 in 2004 (a 43% increase). The eTeachers' Portal increased from virtually nothing to around 36,000 visitors. As the final version of the eTeachers' Portal has only recently been launched we can expect greater use still in 2005.
- Daily hits increased from 60,000 in 2003 to 103,000 in 2004 (70% increase).
- Average visit length also increased by 27%.
- The number of identified users from the UK almost trebled from 2003-2004.

4.4.7 School newspapers

It is worth reporting that there were 8500 downloads of Simon's helpsheet on writing a school newspaper. Judging by the number of search terms (used to find our site) that relate to school newspapers this is a popular search for teachers. It isn't Digital Writing, but it does:

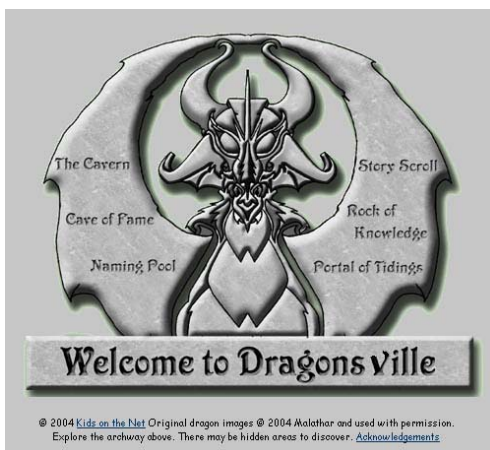
- attract teachers to the site;
- encourage schools to develop online newspapers as well as the print format, thus creating awareness of alternative formats;
- invite contributions to Kids' Castle's online newspaper the Castle Times.

The popularity of this resource reinforces the need to provide resources at the most basic teacher IT skill level that lead on up the "access ramp".

4.5 Dragonsville

Dragonsville is an online collaborative writing project tied into the National Literacy Strategy objectives. This project is intended to be a stepping-stone for teachers who want to begin to use ICT within their literacy lessons, starting with the simple step of using a website to help children develop their writing.

The pilot project involved 11 UK schools who received support and workshops from the digital teacher in residence. A small pilot group of five non-UK schools were also involved, working with Simon only online. The pilot project ran from January-April 2004 and the public launch of the project was on St George's day 23rd April 2004.



The premise is that Dragonsville is a community of dragons who live close to Kids' Castle (another project within the Kids on the Net website). The dragons of Dragonsville are friendly, yet shy dragons who have avoided contact with humans until now. Since learning that the knights of old had spread untruths about them, they have decided that they need to show children how friendly they really are and so have made the decision that it is time to allow children into Dragonsville.

Dragonsville

- has a compelling central theme (dragons) with a linking narrative to interest and inspire children to write;



- provides a series of writing activities each of which fits at least one specific objective in the Key Stage 2 literacy curriculum;
- supports collaborative writing;
- is designed to take the teacher from simple and familiar literacy activities (e.g., writing letters, persuasive writing, constructing arguments) towards more online-based activities such as interactive stories, and introduces a couple of hypertext projects (a simple branching story in the Story Scroll, and a footnote feature in the History) and so aims to introduce Digital Writing concepts in a "safe" way;
- is designed to bring teachers and students from Kids' Castle, the most popular area of the Kids on the Net website, onto our "Digital Writing access ramp";
- includes bright child-friendly graphics by dragon artist Malathar (Kevin Palivec);
- has been very popular with teachers and their classes in the UK and around the world during the pilot and since (see Section 4.5.2).



The project includes writing letters, stories, instructional and information writing, etc. It also introduces children and teachers to some forms of writing that can only be read and enjoyed as they were intended through the use of ICT, such as interactive stories and the hypertextual footnote features within the "further information" area of the History of Dragonsville. Within Dragonsville there are several sections that encourage children to produce literacy work. Each has been designed to fulfil at least one curriculum objective to fit with teachers' termly planning:

- Biographical writing: e.g., Year 6, Term 1, National Literacy Framework Objective 14
- Persuasive writing: e.g., Year 5
- Informational writing: e.g., Year 5
- Writing instructions: e.g., Year 4
- Letter writing: e.g., Year 3
- Character Portraits: e.g., Year 3

In addition there was a hyperlinking task.

Figure 1: Conrad (6) describing his dragon

These areas of the curriculum were chosen, as they were not already covered within the other projects or areas on the main Kids on the Net website. For each area of work teachers' notes and worksheets were produced.



After the pilot period, Dragonsville was launched to the public with an event at Porchester Junior School Nottingham, on 23rd April 2004. The project is now available freely for any teacher to use with their class. The Dragonsville website itself which the children access and which includes all the activities is backed up by a variety of teachers' resources made available in the eTeachers' Portal, including downloadable teachers' notes and pupil worksheets.



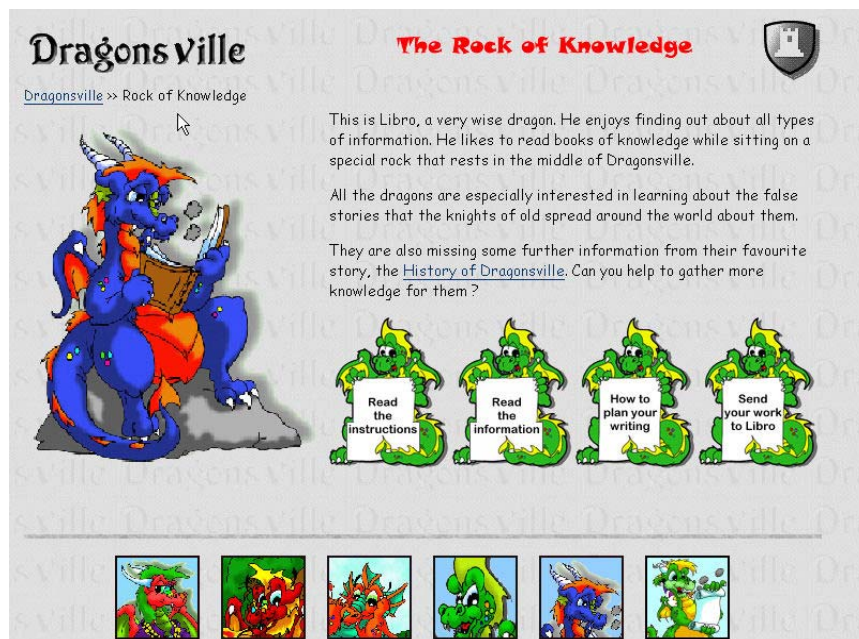
4.5.1 Dragonsville screenshots



Dragonsville comprises six main areas:

The Rock of Knowledge [www.dragonsville.com/rock.htm]

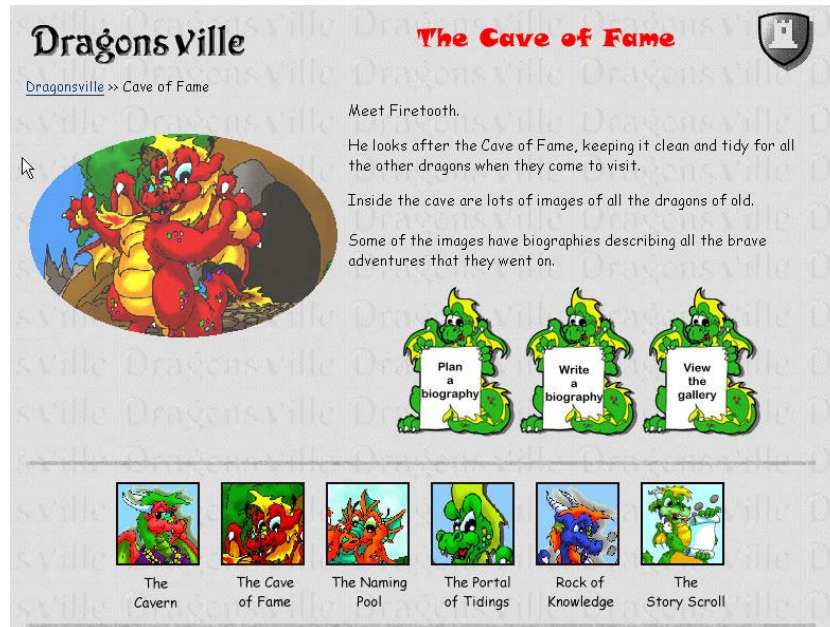
This is an area where the dragons go to find out information. Children are encouraged to research and present information in this area. It involves writing of reports, instructions and information.





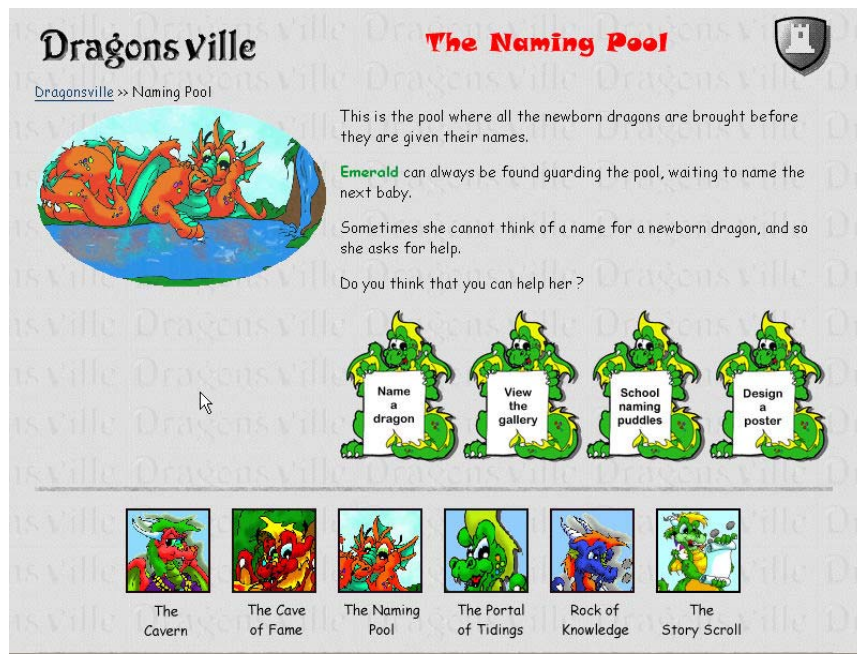
The Cave of Fame [www.dragonsville.com/cave.htm]

Dragons are proud of their ancestors, and like to display images of them. In this area children are able to select a dragon from a gallery of images, and write a biography for it.



The Naming Pool [www.dragonsville.com/pool.htm]

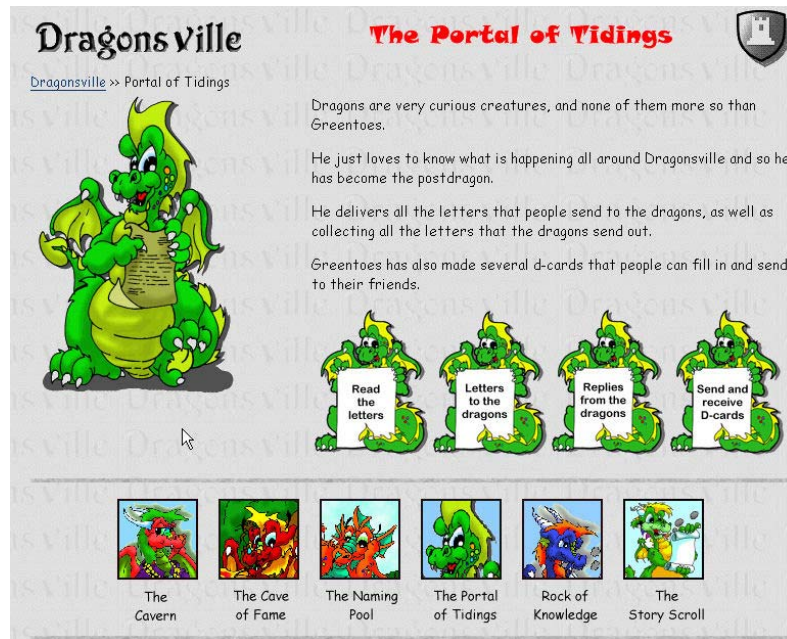
Particularly for younger children, this area encourages children to adopt a young dragon and write a character portrait of it. Once the character portrait is submitted, the child is able to see an animated dragon. There is also an interactive activity to design a "lost dragon" poster (requires Flash).





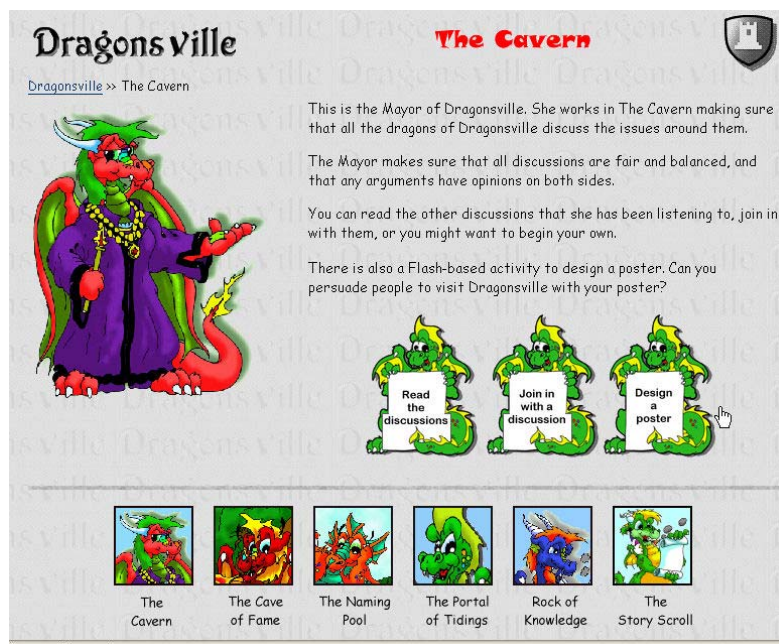
The Portal of Tidings [www.dragonsville.com/portal.htm]

In this area children can write dragonpal letters to the dragons of Dragonsville. During the pilot, the dragons (actually Simon Widdowson, as moderator) replied. There is also a 'D-card' section allowing children to send email postcards to their friends.



The Cavern [www.dragonsville.com/cavern.htm]

This area is Dragonsville's Town Hall. Serious debates based on moral issues take place here. Involves persuasive writing and debates. An interactive activity is included enabling pupils to design a persuasive poster (requires Flash).





The Story Scroll [www.dragonsville.com/scroll.htm]

This area features personalised interactive stories that children can interact with. Children can enter data such as their first name, school, best friend, etc as well as being prompted to think about similes. They can then see this information integrated into a story presented just for them that they can print and keep. There is also an example here of a branching non-linear story in which different schools during the pilot wrote succeeding chapters of a story begun by children's author Karen King and children voted for their favourite. There's also a Metaphor and Simile Quiz.

Dragonsville

[Dragonsville](#) >> Story Scroll



The Story Scroll



Dracospeare is a very famous dragon in Dragonsville. He tells lots of stories to the other dragons.

He has begun to write a new story called 'The story dragon', but he hasn't been able to complete all of the endings to it. Can you help Dracospeare by writing an ending to the story for him?

Dracospeare will read your endings, and then list the best ones in the story ending galleries.

You can also read the [winning entries in the Dragonsville Launch Competition](#): where we asked you to rewrite the story of St George and the Dragon from the point of view of the dragon.



The story dragon



History of the dragons



Star in your own story



View the old lands map








Close this window to return to Dragonsville

Do you know your metaphors ?

0:52

Drag the words on the right to make a metaphor.

Check

The train lines are	snakes
The moon is a	white balloon
Well done ! You are a	jagged knives
The rocks are	golden blanket
The sand is a	star
My pulse is	racing



4.5.2 Evaluation of Dragonsville

Most of the users came to Dragonsville via Kids on the Net or directly to Dragonsville.com rather than through the eTeachers' Portal.

- There were more than 12,000 downloads of the Dragonsville teachers' notes and worksheets (PDF versions)
- The most popular Dragonsville download was about writing letters.
- In the pilot group of schools, on average, teacher confidence in ICT rose by 30%
- In the pilot group of schools, on average, teacher confidence in using ICT within their literacy lessons increased by 40%. (See Appendix 2)

It is clear even from the small pilot group results (Appendix 2) that teachers who were new to using online resources felt much more comfortable with this mode of teaching after the project than before. Dragonsville is very accessible to both children and teachers. The design was intended to be straightforward, easy to use and attractive to children. Dragonsville very much succeeded as a stepping stone for teachers taking their first moves towards using ICT in literacy.

"I was talking to a teacher the other day who hadn't visited Dragonsville before, and I explained to her about the letters and replies. Her eyes lit up and she was amazed that there was a website where (1) children could practice writing in the style of a letter; (2) have their work published for the world to see; (3) be safe in the knowledge that we edit all submissions before publishing them; and (4) even get replies back to some of the questions asked. ... When I see a teacher getting enthused about using the resources, I feel that we have achieved what we aimed for - using ICT to enhance literacy." *Simon Widdowson's blog, Wednesday, June 30, 2004*



"Both boys and girls found the topic of dragons exciting and enjoyed using the site. It got the kids excited about their learning and it improved the quality of their writing." *Richard Clark, Porchester Junior, Dragonsville Pilot*

"The project has been extremely positive - the major impact I feel it's had has been how motivated the children were to contribute ideas to the shared writing of the chapters for the story. Children who have real problems getting their ideas down on paper came out with loads of really inspirational material when that pencil and paper barrier had been removed."

Laura Manison, Teacher, UK

"Because so many children who are weak in writing are confident in ICT, it can give less able children a real measure of success."

Judy Johnson, West Twyford

Teachers using the site and the resources increased their skill and familiarity with the use of ICT in literacy and writing lessons. As an introduction to Digital Writing success is less easy to quantify.



4.5.3 Usage of Dragonsville since the pilot

During 2004 Dragonsville received 138,000 visits (11,000 hits per day).

In the three months immediately after the launch of Dragonsville, it received 3429 submissions (over 260 per week). From Sep-Dec 04 there were 2627 submissions - still running at more than 150 per week. By April, a year after launch, it had received over 10,000 submissions - but the submissions were becoming less relevant.

Hundreds of schools have taken part, in the UK and overseas. Comparing submissions with those on the other parts of the Kids on the Net site it can be seen that more of the submissions come from classes rather than individual children, indicating that Dragonsville is well used in the classroom. One of the most successful uses of Dragonsville was in a school in New Zealand²³.

Analysis of the search terms used to find Dragonsville indicates that it is successful at attracting teachers looking for literacy resources.

Of 7700 searches, the top repeated search terms²⁴ are generally literacy-related :

examples of similes; similes; similes for kids; and similar terms (510 searches)

biography (and similar terms) (273)

writing letters, formal and informal; etc. (874 searches)

writing instructions (and similar searches) (128)

Dragonsville (138)

persuasive writing;;etc. (106)

This means that teachers looking for specific literacy resources are finding our site.



4.6 Adventure Island



Adventure Island is an online tool that enables teachers to create a collaborative hypertextual online story with their classes, without the teacher needing any web-building skills themselves.

In writing Adventure Island, pupils create challenges and puzzles for the visitor to solve. As the visitor travels around a created Island, descriptive writing for each area encourages them to explore further. Will they be able to survive, and leave the island, or will they remain forever ... trapped?

²³ Pirongia School, Waikato, New Zealand: Case study by Tui Allen
<http://kotn.ntu.ac.uk/teachers/pirongia.htm> (accessed 26th March 2005)

²⁴ Site Analysis Report for 2004: <http://kotn.ntu.ac.uk/log/dragonsville/2004/SearchTerms.htm>



Adventure Island was piloted from May to July 2004 on Kids on the Net (<http://kotn.ntu.ac.uk>). It involves imaginative and descriptive writing, or could equally be used with diary writing or poetry. Curriculum-wise it was designed to fit into the UK Yr6/7 transition unit related to the book *Kensuke's Kingdom* by Michael Morpurgo, but during the pilot it became clear that it can also be used as a stand-alone project for other year groups and other Key Stages and in other countries and can incorporate graphics and/or digital video.

Adventure Island was designed specifically to fit in the Transition from Key Stage 2 (primary school) to Key Stage 3 (secondary school). It was built by Simon Widdowson with Simon Mills as web developer, with programming in Cold Fusion. The graphics were by children's illustrator Mark Burgess (who also did Kids' Castle and Monster Motel).

- Many schools and local education authorities use the book *Kensuke's Kingdom*, by Michael Morpurgo, at this stage. They interpret the theme of desert island in writing, drama and other ways. An online collaborative writing project adds to the possibilities.
- The element of the transition provided by secondary schools is often the use of their ICT labs. Also, "the project was useful in the transition from Primary to Secondary School because it gave the high schools a good way to see the children's ICT skills in action: a group project is evidence that's easy to see. They don't always have the time to look at individuals' portfolios." (*Caroline Stamp-Dod, Millfield*)
- The transition projects take place at a time when the youngsters have just finished their SATs for which they were trained in writing in quite prescriptive ways, and they are ready for a kind of writing that is new and exciting.

Adventure Island was well received by the pilot schools:

"The project showed us how Literacy can effectively be combined with ICT in a fun and innovative way, producing some excellent writing."

Emma d'Arcy Ryan (St Martin's, Caversham)

"The class was really engaged in the project - it moved their work on in both English and ICT, giving them further ideas for their ICT work."

Caroline Stamp-Dod, Millfield

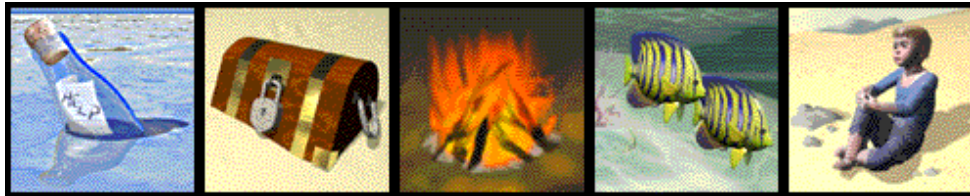




Teacher feedback since the pilot (e.g., INSET day on Visual Literacy in County Durham, August 2004, Transition training in Lambeth LEA in May 2005, and a writing workshop at Foxford Secondary School, December 2004) has indicated that this project has in fact a much wider potential application in other key stages and other subjects: it could be used with simple language and pictures in Key Stage 1, with digital video to fulfill ICT objectives at Key Stage 2, and at Key Stages 3 and 4 in creative writing and ICT.

The results of the Adventure Island Pilot evaluation can be seen in detail in Appendix 3. It can be seen that while the project had little effect on teachers' own Internet skills (in other words the project was at the right level for them), they all gained more confidence in using the Internet in their teaching and/or their teaching of literacy. Pupils were generally seen to have improved in Internet skills and writing confidence.





Feedback from the pilot schools was also used to improve the interface and resource materials for the tool.









Screenshot runthrough of Adventure Island www.kidsonthenet.com/adventureisland

[Explore an island or login to create one]

	
<div data-bbox="406 667 513 772"></div> <h3 data-bbox="518 678 758 701">Welcome to Adventure Island</h3> <p data-bbox="399 786 845 864">An online tool allowing schools and groups to create an island that you, and other people, can visit and explore. Either choose an island from the list on the right hand side and explore around it, or click on the link below and begin to build your own island.</p> <p data-bbox="399 878 837 934">Your island will need descriptions, diary entries, or a journal for each area. There is also the option to upload your own images for each area of the island.</p> <p data-bbox="399 947 507 967">Teachers' Login</p> <p data-bbox="399 981 504 1001">Students' login</p>	<div data-bbox="882 667 986 772"></div> <h3 data-bbox="991 678 1090 696">Latest Islands</h3> <p data-bbox="877 799 1098 819">Durham ICT Testbed - Volcano Island</p> <p data-bbox="877 828 1064 848">Foxford School - Undiscovered</p> <p data-bbox="877 857 1019 878">Example4 - Video Island</p> <p data-bbox="877 887 1082 907">West Twyford - Mercurious Island</p> <p data-bbox="877 916 1043 936">Holne - Island of Lost Hope</p> <p data-bbox="877 945 1053 965">Millfield - Island of Lost Souls</p> <p data-bbox="877 974 1043 994">Sandgate2 - Meerkat Island</p> <p data-bbox="877 1003 1061 1023">Russells Hall2 - Treasure Island</p> <p data-bbox="877 1032 1051 1052">Russells Hall - No mans Island</p> <p data-bbox="877 1061 1023 1081">St Martins - Black Island</p> <p data-bbox="877 1090 1018 1111">Example3 - Story Island</p> <p data-bbox="877 1120 1062 1140">Example2 - Island of Adventure</p> <p data-bbox="877 1149 1015 1169">Example1 - Diary Island</p>

[Explore an island - Example of school island content page]

	
<p data-bbox="391 1442 606 1462"><i>Island of Lost Hope from Holne</i></p> <p data-bbox="391 1476 861 1619">After crossing a grassy wasteland, he sees a stream nearby, it looks safe to drink but he can't be sure. Karl notices large mountains in the distance. The mountains are rugged and steep. To the West he can see a palm tree with strong purple coloured fruit. It looks very blurry in the distance. He feels hungry. Suddenly Karl wonders if he is hallucinating. He pulls his gaze away and wonders what to do next.</p>	
	<p data-bbox="906 1852 991 1872">Start Again</p>



[Create an Island - Example of teacher's interface]

The interface is divided into four quadrants. Top-left: A satellite image of a blue ocean with white waves. Top-right: A wooden signpost with the text 'ADVENTURE ISLAND' and small icons of a treasure chest, a compass, and a map. Bottom-left: A list of actions with buttons: 'Please choose the action you would like to undertake.', 'Edit the Island/School Details', 'Choose Map', 'Choose Start Co-ordinate', 'Edit Map Texts', 'Allow Access', 'Test Map', and 'Edit Clues'. Bottom-right: A large empty yellow box with a small treasure chest icon in the top-left corner and a 'Logout' link at the bottom.

[Create an Island - Example of student interface during editing]

The interface is divided into four quadrants. Top-left: A satellite image of a blue ocean with white waves. Top-right: A wooden signpost with the text 'ADVENTURE ISLAND' and small icons of a treasure chest, a compass, and a map. Bottom-left: A 10x10 grid of a satellite image. Above the grid is the text 'You have chosen grid 16'. Bottom-right: A text entry area with the prompt 'Write your text for this entry here:' and a text box containing the text: 'Jon and Asha decide to climb the foothills of the mountain in the centre of the island. The further they get up the mountain the further they will be able to see of the island - and of the surrounding sea. Perhaps somewhere out there is a | I'. Below the text box are buttons for 'Update this grid' and 'Return to homepage'. At the bottom right is a 'Logout' link.



[Create an Island - Example of teacher's final editing interface]

You have chosen grid 10

Entry for this grid:

You find yourself suddenly above a deep gully where waves crash through a narrow entrance from the sea and pund sheer cliffs. against. The rocks about you are slippery and just the right there's a sudden crumbling and parts of the cliff fall into the churning water. Be careful you don't fall!

LinkN ☒ LinkE ☐

LinkS ☐ LinkW ☐

Clue 2

Update this grid

[Return to Island Editor Home](#)

[Logout](#)

Follow-up on use of Adventure Island

In the June 3rd 2005 issue of the Times Educational Supplement, Adventure Island featured in an article written by Harriet Swain "Write me an island", with several quotes from Cathy McCarthy, one of the pilot project teachers. In 2005, a year after the pilot, Adventure Island is being used in the Transition stage throughout Lambeth LEA and in dozens of schools across the UK.





4.7 Problems


4.7.1 Lack of best practice

"English as a subject area isn't moving as fast as it could in ICT." *Ruth Hammond, BECTA, TTAG Member*

"It is very difficult to find examples of best practice in literacy in ICT." *Keith Harrison, Headteacher, TTAG member*

"As far as the research literature goes, there isn't a great deal I'm aware of on children's 'new media writing'." *Ben Williamson, Futurelab, TTAG Member*

As mentioned in section 3.3 above, it is not easy to find projects outside Kids on the Net that demonstrate good practice in new media literacy (see Section 5.2.1 for what constitutes good practice).



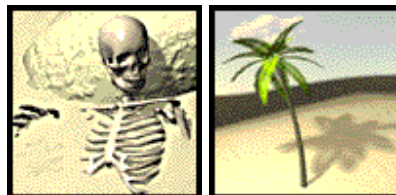
Hypertext stories

The Kids on the Net Guide to Writing a Hypertext Adventure

Writing the adventure itself
Adventure Island has been designed so that you can create an island that other people are able to visit and explore. You can create descriptions for each area of your island, and these can be written in either the style of a story, diary or guide.
You can include on your island areas that will trap an unsuspecting visitor, and force them to start again, as well as including four clues that, once found, will allow the visitor to escape from the island and back to civilisation.

Technology points.
It's always best to sketch out your ideas on paper, then type the descriptions and edit it in a word processor, and

As an example, a speaker gave a talk on *Digital Literacy in Practice* at the Scottish Book Trust's March 2005 conference. "New challenges and opportunities await as we expand our definition of literacy to include far more than being able to read a book or write an essay. Computer literacy, media v literacy [sic] and information literacy are now essential skills for young people, and the rapid infusion of the Internet into the classroom calls for a fundamental change in the focus of schools and teachers. The session will highlight some of the issues associated with the changing literacies and review some of the leading software resources." However, from my research I cannot find any of his examples of what this "fundamental change" could look like.



At an interview with an LEA literacy advisor, she showed me a book review site one of her schools had created, that they were rolling out across the authority's intranet. The design and concept of the project was, by the standards of Writers for the Future, eight years out of date. Without well-publicized examples of good practice, teachers are re-inventing the wheel. The



ICT strand of the teacher-training course includes how to create multimodal texts in Powerpoint, but this is taught by a Powerpoint expert, not a digital writer, and as ICT and not literacy.

“It’s so important that people like yourselves offer good creative opportunities, to encourage teachers not just to see ICT as special or unusual in itself but as a tool a teacher can use in their subject teaching.” *Ruth Hammond, BECTA, TTAG Member*

All this means that innovative work such as Writers for the Future can seem isolated and unusual - and therefore appear difficult and even irrelevant to teachers.

4.7.2 Teachers’ time constraints

When shown the kind of work that could be done in the classroom within the curriculum, teachers were quick to see the potential of our resources. They made suggestions about where in the curriculum the projects could be used.

It was more difficult to challenge the focus of their and their pupils’ reading. Teachers were not inspired by Digital Writing in general, but by practical demonstrations of children’s improvements in literacy skills using these methods. Their interest was entirely curriculum focused. Although it’s true that “I don’t know what my vision can be unless someone shows me what’s possible” (*Keith Harrison*), our experience in workshops with teachers showed that teachers tended to be inspired only by practical and classroom-based successful projects, not by examples of digital or new media writing by practitioners.

“Teachers have to look at things very quickly - even if you would like to look at things in more depth there usually isn’t time - so if you can’t grasp it fast you don’t bother.” *Richard Clark, teacher, Dragonsville pilot.*

This also means that relatively unsophisticated stand-alone projects like Dragonsville - which only touch on Digital Writing - are currently more popular with teachers than the more complex Adventure Island, which demonstrates more innovative ways to write. It has also implications for the future of this work (see section 6).

4.7.3 The slow pace of change

During the Writers for the Future project we have only just begun to fulfill our objective to generate a body of exemplar hypermedia created by children. We have certainly added to the examples of hypermedia to which children have collaborated. The branching and interactive stories in Dragonsville, the Adventure Islands already created, the collaborative discussions and writing projects, these are all important and inspiring examples to show teachers what can be done.

Tools such as Adventure Island allow a class to decide (in collaboration) what kind of story they want, from a linear story to a branching adventure, a first person narrative or an exploratory game. These tools are specifically designed for the creation of Digital Writing. But by providing the tools for teachers we have not yet started to address the question of how to encourage young people to create their own hypermedia.

Morwenna Griffiths of Nottingham Trent University has developed via research in schools an ‘Apprenticeship Cycle’ as the model of learning²⁵. It is a model which enables the continuing

²⁵ Paper given at Creative Partnerships’ Nottingham conference on Creative Apprenticeships, October 2004



professional development of teachers and of the creative workers who come into school. In this model there are stages in the development of artistic practice

1. watching and learning (mostly the practitioner demonstrating)
2. participating (learning skills needed under the guidance of the practitioner: taking part in projects set up by the practitioner)
3. creating (working under the guidance of the practitioner to develop original work)
4. independent creation (completely original work)

It can be seen that this model applies as much to the development of an art form itself - or a literature form - such as Digital Writing - as it does to learning a new art form.

Writers for the Future did a lot of stage 2 work; developing Digital Writing skills in teachers and young people. Adventure Island where the young people have a real input into the form of the story begins to approach stage 3, but on the whole there are still in this country in the area of Digital Writing very few skilled practitioners to lead this work. I see this as an opportunity for us at Kids on the Net/eTeachers' Portal, and for the teachers that we have already trained.



5 Lessons and Guidelines

5.1 *Tips for teachers using this kind of project in their classrooms*

Digital Writing can clearly meet literacy goals when used effectively. Like all new techniques of teaching and all use of technology, there is a learning curve involved in using these methods in the classroom. However, as Dragonsville pilot teacher Richard Clark said, "It's worth it - the children get so much more out of it."

Here are some tips recommended by teachers who have taken part in our pilot projects:

- Make sure you are very familiar with the project and confident in using it before you begin (EDR). I had to personally know the project well, and the site well, in order to teach effectively. (LP) Go through the process yourself before doing it with the class (CSD) I would emphasise the importance of **planning**, particularly a linear plan of the order in which things need to be done. (JJ)
- It's the kind of project which may need to be done in one go over 2 days rather than over a fragmented period of time. (EDR)
Set aside time to do the project justice. (LP)
- Be willing to **let the children lead** the direction - they may be more au fait with online narrative and how digital story works, how to move it along. (CSD)
- Plan an associated paper-based activity in case of technical failures or other hold-ups, so the children have something to do. (CSD)
- **Share your work** with the rest of the school, e.g., in assembly with a projector. (CSD)
- **Disseminate information** about the project in the school newsletter so that parents can look on the Internet and see what their children have been doing. (CSD)

The Writers for the Future team would also add that to do this kind of writing successfully in schools you need:



- Good **technology** and good **technical support** (much more widespread now than at the beginning of the project);
- Enthusiastic teachers **prepared to experiment**;
- Enough **flexibility** in the curriculum to be creative;
- An **awareness** that ICT is a tool to be used within subjects not a curriculum area separate from the others: and specifically that Digital Writing is concerned with literacy not ICT skills;
- Solid **leadership** with an understanding of how literacy goals can be met with Digital Writing.

While all of the teachers in the pilot projects improved their skills and confidence in using digital writing in the classroom, and stated that they hoped to continue using Kids on the Net projects and other digital writing activities in their classrooms, two of the teachers with whom we worked in the pilot stages of Adventure Island have become interested enough to want to do more of these kind of projects and to involve other teachers in their schools and LEAs. This kind of cascading of skills and awareness is exactly what Writers for the Future hoped to achieve.



5.2 Lessons learned / guidelines for Kids on the Net

5.2.1 How we support Digital Writing in schools: criteria for best practice

- **Guide teachers along the “access ramp”.**
Digital Writing in schools is still in its infancy (see the Apprenticeship Cycle model of learning described above) but as the technology becomes more available and more reliable in schools, teachers are becoming more confident with it and looking for new ways to use it. We have provided the resources within the eTeachers’ Portal to allow them to experiment at whatever level they feel comfortable with along the “access ramp”. The resources will continue to be of use to schools (with minimal maintenance from staff) to display children’s work, which is within the remit of the existing Kids on the Net resourcing.
- **Sustain innovative projects for many teachers (and classes) to experience.**
From the responses we have seen during this project, our work is still seen as innovative. There is still work to do to help teachers, education advisers and others working with kids to write with technology to see the full potential (beyond using the digital as a tool, e.g., a writer working with kids by email but the writing still happens offline; or extending a round robin story to become non-linear). If Digital Writing is seen in the context of a wider movement to increase the use of technology in education and the arts, then it seems likely that more and more of what can be called Digital Writing or new media writing will take place. The resources and projects created by Writers for the Future and the ongoing Kids on the Net team are in a good position to continue to take a lead role in that. It’s important that projects continue to run for as long as possible so that they can be experienced by as many teachers as possible as they come to explore this field.
- **Encourage the development of universal skills for eliteracy and Digital Writing not software-dependent methods.**
Restrictions on the kinds of software and hardware available in schools mean that Digital Writing that happens is not necessarily happening in a sustainable way (e.g.,



writing animated stories in Powerpoint). There is scope here to provide in future educational resources and training showing how to move beyond Powerpoint. The elements of writing digital stories need to be taught in the context of learning the writing craft generally, not just in ICT lessons.

- **Encourage wider publication on the Internet of digital projects produced in schools.**
It's been my experience over and over again that digital projects often don't see the light of day because they are not published. I've only found out about them myself through talking to practitioners and attending conferences where a project may be demonstrated publicly for the one and only time outside the school or LEA intranet. Yet publication on the Web is a strong motivator for children (see their comments in Appendix 4). Some of the reasons for this lack of publication include the difficulty of teachers publishing on the Web without spending a lot of time and becoming experts in HTML; also there are concerns about safety which discourage teachers who don't have time to become experts on the safe ways to publish. Intranets within groups of schools and within LEAs and within school-only communities have become so popular for the perceived values of safety that public websites are barely considered, even if it for perfectly safe publication purposes. The eTeachers' Portal could be used to demonstrate the advantages of online publication. Possible future developments in this area are discussed in Section 6.
- **Keep digital resources relevant to the existing curriculum.**
Teachers and education advisers don't have time to look "out of the box" and are very reliant on the information sent by educational organizations (this has implications for our marketing). Literacy and ICT advisers generally aren't readers of electronic literature or consumers of digital creativity in the way that children are. Reading the digital is still a minority interest among adults. Due to lack of time, resources that fit into the curriculum and are endorsed by, e.g., BECTA or QCA are preferred - teaching is becoming more homogeneous with less room for innovation. It is vital that resources are high quality and have a clear place in the curriculum. Our resources aimed to meet these requirements.
 - We used experienced teachers, now education consultants, to set up initial teacher portal;
 - A teacher-in-residence was specifically employed to write further content;
 - All projects were developed to meet specific objectives in the National Literacy Framework as well as wider curriculum aims where possible;
 - Projects were evaluated and prototyped by practicing teachers in schools.
- **Provide tools for young people themselves to write for digital media.**
There are some very high-quality digital resources produced by multimedia education providers (and to some extent they compete for attention with our lower-tech website), but on the whole they are not encouraging children to make their own digital works. Such resources include subscription websites, CDs, DVDs and software that provide interactive and animated literacy and other activities. As a free resource our technical resources are limited and we choose to keep our design deliberately low-tech (simple, but appropriate) to foreground the writing aspect, to be seen as teacher-friendly and to encourage teachers to think they can achieve something similar at this level. The participatory aspect of our projects is very important to maintain, and is a unique feature compared with subscription websites and CDs that do not include this publication aspect.



5.2.2 Giving young people a real stake in the digital aspects of writing

Like much of the work previously mentioned, many of the Digital Writing projects on Kids on the Net required the input of a digital writer to make the website work, but on projects such as Adventure Island the ideas and the final form of the new media can be chosen by the young people themselves. For example, some liked to create branching adventure stories, others a game-like narrative.

It is probable that the writers of the future who will be creating Digital Writing will develop not by watching and working with current "new media writing" or "Digital Writing practitioners" but by combining skills learned from a variety of sources - ICT technical experts, artists, writers, all of whom show some new media influences in or aspects of their work, and also, significantly, their own experiments with digital communication including SMS, blogging, free web tools, and their peers. For those of us who are predominantly digital writers, it is even more important to continue to work in schools to help individual teachers and students through this apprenticeship cycle.

In my view it would be interesting to do a research project into the "underground" creative writing activities of young people in games communities, forums and interactive environments like *the Sims* and *Habbo Hotel*, and to find out what tools they would like to have to improve their Digital Writing.



6 Future Directions

6.1 Future of eTeachers' Portal

A repeated comment is that examples of good practice in this area are very difficult to find. We have just started to see teachers turning to the eTeachers' Portal as a place to publicise their work. The eTeachers' Portal is an obvious place to disseminate good practice in the UK and from around the world.

Possible next steps could include:

- Developing the mailing list into a **network of teachers** interested in this kind of work. As more teachers become involved in it, such a network could be crucial to helping them develop their skills and understanding.
- Seeking out examples of good practice and **documenting** them. Collect information about what is happening and publicise it - e.g., case studies, how-we-did-it. Get others to submit these where at all possible (have had a couple of enquiries along these lines so far).
- Becoming a **hub for the sharing** of good practice. Encouraging schools and LEAs to share their work outside walled gardens. Publishing or linking to the outcomes of Digital Writing projects.
- Joining **organisations** and contacting key researchers to make them aware of the final results of the Writers for the Future project and to set the stage for possible future partnerships.
- We have set up an **eTeachers' News Blog** facility so that as new projects and initiatives come to our notice we can share them on an ongoing basis in a manner easily maintained within existing funding. (This can be seen under "News" on the eTeachers' Portal site.)
- We could bring our resources to the notice of the **teacher training** bodies where there are likely to be more opportunities in future to explore Digital Writing.



So long as we can secure further funding (see Section 6.2) then we will continue to bring this work to the attention of teachers, to encourage sharing of good practice and to build a network of the diverse people involved in Digital Writing, many of whom don't realize that they are part of a movement.



6.2 Future of Kids on the Net & similar organisations

Kids on the Net will continue to develop projects for clients in the education, local authority and arts sectors and to apply for grants to develop projects for UK schools and with a global reach. The work with Writers for the Future provides a sound basis for this activity in future. Our funding may come from sponsorship and consultancy based on the work we have done during Writers for the Future. A marketing campaign involving a dedicated section on the eTeachers' Portal website, and publicity in the Artscape Directory is already underway, and is beginning to attract enquiries. We are also working to be added to Curriculum Online.

Our work in schools must continue to be of good quality and replicable by teachers. It is always preferable to develop teachers' skills rather than to work solely with a class or group of children.

We will be applying for new sources of funding for new projects, always producing teachers' resources and tools wherever possible so that projects can be made available to other teachers after the pilot phases. Projects and accompanying resources should continue to sit on the "access ramp" to provide teachers with a clear path towards more advanced Digital Writing. That does not mean that projects cannot be innovative and extra-curricular as well.

The time taken to edit submissions has already become a problem with Dragonsville and other areas of Kids on the Net. We cannot create new projects if staff are bogged down editing the old ones. A variety of measures are being taken to address this issue. Future projects should, like Adventure Island, involve teachers more closely in monitoring their pupils' writing. To encourage classes to submit only their best work we have added passwords to some of the submission forms (e.g., for Kids' Castle and the Naming Pool in Dragonsville): teachers may apply for the passwords freely but it will discourage the instant submission by young people of writing without thought, random keyboard symbols and abusive messages.

Kids on the Net needs to broaden participation with involvement by more teachers, writers and others. The mailing list developed during this project is a good place to start to find such collaborators. We have also recruited volunteers from among Nottingham Trent University teacher trainees and offered volunteer opportunities to staff working for our sponsor Experian.

We will build on the experience of the Teacher Tools Advisory Group by making more use of the Kids on the Net Advisory Board and extending their remit to the eTeachers' Portal.

It's likely that Kids on the Net will in future have more contact with both the School of Education and a Learning and Teaching Support group within Nottingham Trent University, with varied expertise in web development and graphic design and other people doing web-based education projects.

Experience with the Writers for the Future project has demonstrated that the input of a teacher was invaluable to give the "view from the chalk face" or, more realistically nowadays, "from the interactive whiteboard"! Opportunities will be sought to secure further teachers in residence or ways of working in partnership with teachers and others in education.





6.3 Development potential

Elearning is becoming more mainstream in schools. By using the “access ramp” model we have ensured that when our simpler online literacy tasks become more commonplace there is a clear path towards more innovative and inspiring ways to use Digital Writing in education.

Many of the projects produced during Writers for the Future and by Kids on the Net are particularly appropriate for use with interactive whiteboards which are increasingly available in schools.

Other trends can be spotted for development work:

- the use of blogs;
- more after-school clubs with access to the school ICT lab and a need to do something creative;
- greater use of technology in schools for the community as teachers and schools become more familiar with it
- initiatives to develop creativity in the classroom.

Conclusion

“In today's networked society, children read and communicate across a range of platforms. They consume and engage with new media at every turn - on their mobile phones, in the games they play at home, in the entertainments available in their communities, on the family computer and TV. The classroom teacher who is disengaged from the digital world is not only unable to meet the challenges of teaching within this entirely new conceptual framework, but is oblivious to the opportunities it offers.

“Simon Widdowson, the Digital Teacher-in-Residence, worked closely with teachers and schools to create web-based resources focused on curriculum needs yet innovative in concept. The resources, including Dragonsville and Adventure Island, were fine tuned with feedback from the pilot teachers and continue to be available.

“This is a learning-by-doing medium and the eTeachers' Portal, with its web-writing activities, personalised workshops and consultancy service, is an invaluable resource for the enterprising teacher wishing to acquire new skills. I look forward to seeing its further promotion in the classroom supported by a suite of training visits and extended training materials for teachers.”

*Sue Thomas, Project Leader of Writers for the Future
Professor of New Media, De Montfort University*



Appendices

Appendix 1: Timeline for Writers for the Future in the Classroom

June 2003

TTAG meeting 30th

September 2003

SW becomes Digital teacher part-time

SW eTeachers' Portal resources redevelopment

October 2003

TextLab

December 2003

TTAG meeting 8th December 2003

January 2004

SW Digital teacher full-time

SW BETT Show

HW talk to Secondary English trainees Ed Fac 16 Jan 2004

Dragonsville Planning Meeting for schools 22nd January 2004

Dragonsville Development

SW and HW @ NESTA Event'04

February 2004

HW Writing Together - Newcastle 5th Feb

HW Writing Together - Manchester 12th Feb

NGFL badging achieved - Feb 26th 2004

Dragonsville Development

March 2004

Meeting with Professor Jean Underwood about research 3rd March

HW Writing Together - Birmingham Mar 26

SW Lecture to 3rd year Primary BEd trainees Ed Fac

SW visiting schools re Dragonsville pilot

SW attends Futurelab Digital Dialogues conference

Dragonsville development

April 2004

Website Accessibility Training 20th April

Dragonsville Launch 23rd April

May 2004

Adventure Island planning

Newark & Notts Show 8th May

SW talk to ICT Coordinators, Nottingham City LEA May

June 2004

Pilot of Adventure Island taking place



TTAG Virtual Meeting: Visits to Lesley James at RCA, Ruth Hammond at BECTA, Keri & Ben at Futurelab, Keith Harrison, Carol Posnett

July 2004

SW speaking at Yeovil Federation INSET Day
Incubation Conference
Teachers' Reception
SW speaking at Digital Generations Conference

August 2004

SW & HW Inset Day - Visual Literacy - at Durham, featuring Adventure Island

September 2004

SW ends time as teacher-in-residence
HW Meeting with Notts LEA literacy advisor

October 2004

HW @ Creative Partnerships conference on Apprenticeship Model of Learning
HW presented at NAWE conference, York - included WftF projects

November 2004

HW NESTA Parliamentary Reception, November 16th
SW speaks at Futurelab conference, Beyond the Blackboard, Future Directions for Teaching, 3-4 November, about his time as Digital Teacher-in-Residence
HW & Team Dragonsville Prize Winner award ceremony 11th November

December 2004

Adventure Island used by HW in secondary school, Coventry
TTAG Virtual Meeting: talk to Carol Posnett, Ruth Hammond at BECTA

January 2004

TTAG Virtual Meeting continued: talk to Lesley James, Ben Williamson, Keith Harrison

Teacher Tools Advisory Group Members

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| • Catherine Gillam | Research Administrator |
| • Sue Thomas | Project Leader & Chair |
| • Helen Whitehead | Assistant Project Leader |
| • Simon Widdowson | Digital Teacher in Residence (to Sep 2004) |
| • Lesley James | RCA |
| • Joe Elliot | NESTA Advisor |
| • Keith Harrison | Headteacher |
| • Keri Facer/Ben Williamson | Futurelab |
| • Carol Posnett | NTU School of Education |
| • Ruth Hammond | BECTA |



Appendix 2: Dragonsville Pilot Project Evaluation (Simon Widdowson)

Dragonsville was piloted from February to April 2005 and was launched publicly on 23rd April 2005 with an event at Porchester Junior School, Mapperley, Nottingham. The pilot project involved Haddon Primary School, Porchester Junior School, Killisick Junior School, and Southwold Primary School, all in Nottingham/Notts. Also Frodsham C.E. Primary School, Cheshire; Kingsway School, York; Longlevens Junior School, Gloucestershire; Luckwell Primary School, Bristol; South Hykeham School, Lincolnshire; and Wheatfields Junior School, Cambridgeshire (a total of 10 in the UK). Other schools involved online were Hachores Elementary School, Israel; and in the USA Hambrick Elementary School, Georgia; Naumann Elementary School, Texas; ABC Stewart School, Indiana; and W.E.B. DuBois Academy, Ohio.

Dragonsville is now open to schools and individuals all over the world, and receives many submissions from both the UK and internationally. It received over 10,000 contributions in its first year.

In July 2004 Simon Widdowson reported as follows:

While editing the submissions the following trends have become noticeable:

Time of submissions:

Between 9am - 12am multiple UK submissions from the same school often arrive. They will all be submissions to the same area of the site. Speaking to some teachers who have used the site, this is during a literacy lesson when the class have used the ICT suite. This is a time when the site is being used to develop literacy skills.

Between 12pm - 2pm UK schools continue to send work in, although the areas vary. This is when children are working in the ICT suite and are allowed to 'explore' the site. The focus for the child here is more the development of their ICT skills.

From 2pm onwards, international submissions begin to appear. Many of these are individual submissions, with the occasional flurry of multiple submissions from a school. There has been a recent rise in the number of Australian school submissions.

Content:

Most submissions are independent and isolated; that is, they can be taken out of Dragonsville and read and still make sense. However, there is a school in the South of England who have spent a lot of time preparing their work for Dragonsville. Their biographies and character portraits contain references to other submitted work from their peers.

"This dragon is called Mysterize. She is master at breathing out fire and keeping mysterious secrets. ... Mysterize has many friends like Bossy Boots and Miffy. She loves being a dragon in Dragonsville. "

"Bossy Boots is 7 years old ... His best friends are Mysterize and Miffy."

"Miffy is 8 years old. ... She has three best friend dragons called Fire, Mysterize and Bossy Boots."

"This is Fire. ... Mysterize, Miffy, Bossy Boots and Ce-saw. He has even made his own band with Ce-saw and Vola."



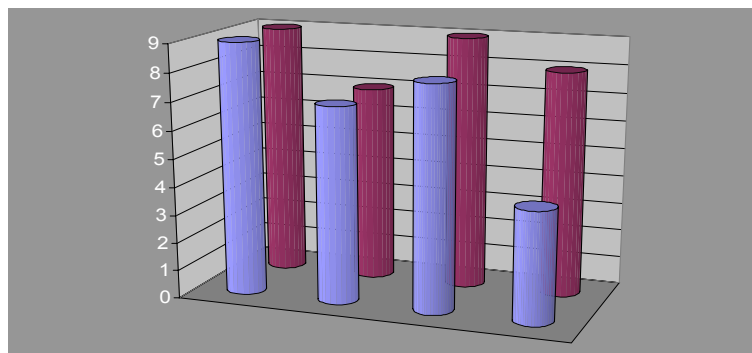
"Multi loves to paint ... She has three best friends named Pinky, Mysterize and Bossy Boots. "

Individual children can also be seen to have shown development of letter-writing skills in succeeding letters submitted to the site.

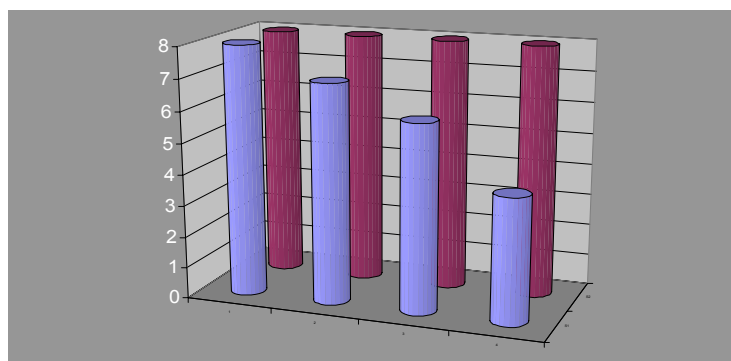
Teacher Skills

We asked the pilot schools involved to complete both a pre evaluation and post evaluation form, that we would be able to use to assess the impact of the project. Four of the schools completed both forms - many more completed one or the other, but not both! (Note: Only four out of X schools - so this is a small sample, but representative of informal responses from other schools.)

As you can see from the graph below, in all the schools that responded teachers felt that their ICT skills had either remained the same, or improved as a result of the work with Dragonsville. The school on the left contained an experienced ICT coordinator who rated themselves as 10 out of 10 both before and after. The teacher from the school on the right said their confidence rose dramatically as a result - from 4 before, to 9 after. On average, teacher confidence in ICT rose by 30%

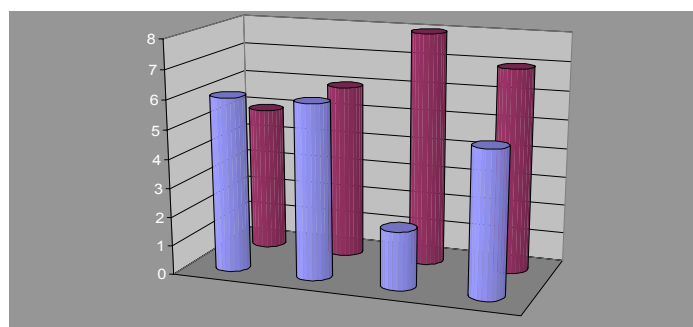


Also, as you can see from the second graph, below, teachers in the pilot group felt more confident to use ICT within their literacy lessons during, and after, the project, with an average increase of 40%. Once again the school on the left were using technology both before and after, but the teacher at the school on the right once again improved their confidence.



Pupil Skills

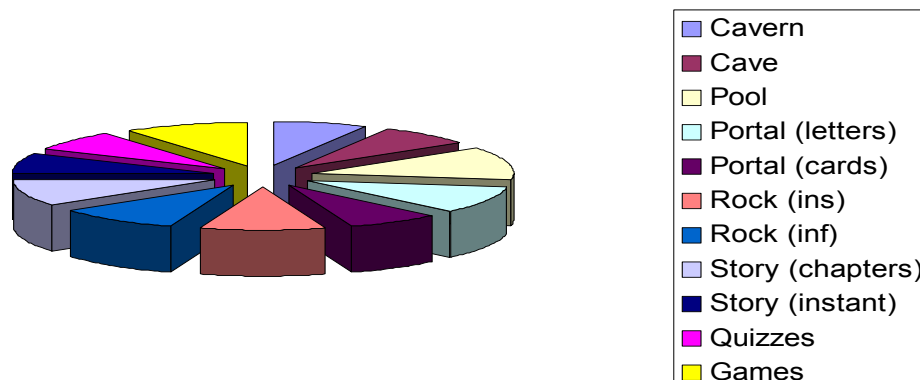
We also asked schools to give an average class figure for pupil confidence when using the Internet, ranging from 1 to 10.



Two schools responded by grading their pupils at point 6 both before and after, while the remaining schools reported that their pupil's confidence had improved significantly following the project. The results speak for themselves with an average improvement of over 50%. In schools that rated their pupils ICT at a confident / advanced level, the improvements were not as high as schools that rated their pupils ICT skills as basic pre-pilot. This is what we expected. It would have interesting to have formally assessed pupils literacy abilities both before and after the pilot project, however this was not possible. The results we have obtained, along with anecdotal evidence suggest that children's literacy skills have improved. This is an area that could be researched in the future, should funding be available.

Site use

As mentioned previously the site is split into several areas, and all areas were used frequently during the pilot stage. The Naming Pool area - Character portrait writing - was slightly more popular than other areas, and this is reflected in current submissions to the site. The Naming Pool is by far the busiest part of the site.



A surprise to me was how the site was used within schools. I had expected classes to be taken into the ICT suite, however teachers responded to the evaluation form by saying that they had used the site in the classroom, mainly in small groups. The reasons for this is the literacy hour - while some of the class were working on tasks in books / paper, others were working in small groups on computers in the classroom with TA / adult support. For some of the schools involved there was no choice other than to work in small groups due to the lack of an ICT suite and equipment.



Appendix 3: Adventure Island Evaluation Results

Adventure Island was piloted in July 2004.

School	Teacher	Teacher pre eval	Pupil pre-eval	Live island	Teacher post-eval	Pupil post-eval
West Twyford	Judy Johnson	Y	--	Mercurious Island	Y	--
St Martin's Caversham	Emma d'Arcy Ryan	Y	29	Black Island	Y	--
Holne Chase	Cathy McCarthy	Y	30	Island of Lost Hope	Y	Y
Millfield	Caroline Stamp-Dod	Y	26	Island of Lost Souls	Y	--
Sandgate	Laura Pearce	Y	--	Meerkat Island	Y	--
Foxford (Secondary: December 2004)	Alan Huitson		Y	Undiscovered		Y

Grade from 1 (poor) - 10 (excellent):

Your personal Internet skills

	Before	After
Sandgate - Laura Pearce	6	6
West Twyford - Judy Johnson	6	8
St Martin's - Emma d'Arcy Ryan	8	8
Millfield - Caroline Stamp-Dod	9	9
Holne Chase - Cathy McCarthy	7	9

How confident are you in using ICT in your teaching

	Before	After
Sandgate - Laura Pearce	4	5
West Twyford - Judy Johnson	7	8
St Martin's - Emma d'Arcy Ryan	8	8
Millfield - Caroline Stamp-Dod	9	9
Holne Chase - Cathy McCarthy	8	10

How confident are you in using ICT in teaching literacy and English

	Before	After
Sandgate - Laura Pearce	5	5
West Twyford - Judy Johnson	8	8
St Martin's - Emma d'Arcy Ryan	5	7



Millfield - Caroline Stamp-Dod	7	8
Holne Chase - Cathy McCarthy	8	10

Your pupils' Internet skills (average through the class)

	Before	After
Sandgate - Laura Pearce	5	6
West Twyford - Judy Johnson	4	5
St Martin's - Emma d'Arcy Ryan	5	6
Millfield - Caroline Stamp-Dod	6	8
Holne Chase - Cathy McCarthy	6	8-9

Pupils' confidence in writing (average through the class)

	Before	After
Sandgate - Laura Pearce	7	7
West Twyford - Judy Johnson	4	6
St Martin's - Emma d'Arcy Ryan	6	7
Millfield - Caroline Stamp-Dod	7	8
Holne Chase - Cathy McCarthy	6	8



Appendix 4: What children say about Digital Writing

Children at Holne Chase Combined School (in Year 6, aged 11) gave their impressions immediately after their Adventure Island project was complete, and were then resurveyed four months later. (These are the complete results.)

Initial comments

I am very pleased that all our hard work is now on the Web.
I think Adventure Island is great: it gets us to open our mind
I am happy that our work is on the Internet
Adventure Island was good fun, but was difficult sometimes. It really got my imagination flowing.
I feel proud to have my writing up on the internet.
I think Adventure Island is great and very fun.
I think it is really good that it is finally on the Web for everyone to see after all the hard work that has been done to prepare it.
I think Adventure Island will be a classic adventure that will be loved by all.
Very good, very exciting and fun. Very good experience.
I think Adventure Island is great because it is fun and can imagine all sorts of things.
It was fun to do and I am glad for it to be shown to everyone on the internet.
I think that it was really fun and interesting doing Adventure Island. Thanks to everyone.
I think it was a great experience.
I am amazed that the work put on the internet so
Adventure Island is wicked!!! The way there is unseen traps makes you want to start over again and succeed. 10/10!
It was a great experience.
I am honoured that some of my work is on the internet for all to see.
I think it is really cool that our work is on the Web.
I enjoyed Adventure Island. It was really good.
I am happy that all our work has reached the Web.
I really liked doing Adventure Island and it was good because it was different.
I thought Adventure Island was excellent. I enjoyed the whole experience and hope to do something alike soon.
I loved the Adventure Island project, it is nice to know that all our hard work has paid off. It was so much fun to be involved!

Holne Chase pupils: After four months

1. Do you enjoy writing on the computer?

More than on paper	14
About the same	9
Prefer writing on paper	0

Conclusion: digital writing or writing using the computer is very popular

2. Do you enjoy reading on the internet?

More than books	1
I enjoy both books and online stories	8



I prefer reading books	10
Don't read stories on the internet	4

Conclusion: Reading digital writing is not as popular as writing. But the figure enjoying reading online is much higher than it would be in an adult population

4. Who has read your writing now that it is available on the internet? (Can tick more than one)

Me	18
My classmates	19
My teacher	17
Other people in school	9
My family	3
Friends/relatives	3

Conclusion: Despite the fact that they say that they like the idea of other people reading their work, they haven't brought it to the attention of friends and family!

5. Have you done any more writing on the Internet since the Adventure Island project?

On Kids on the Net? Yes	0	No	23
On any other website? Yes	1	No	22

Conclusion: Despite the stated enthusiasm, it doesn't seem to have inspired them to go off searching for other opportunities to do digital writing!

3. Can you recommend any good story sites on the internet?

Sometimes on the BBC website
Spy High series by A J Butcher
CBBC

Conclusion: only 3 answers, and not particularly good ones.

6. What do you think is different about writing on the internet?

People publicly can read it, people that don't know me.
Your writing is neater. X2
It is more neater on the internet and you know you can be proud of it.
It is different to write on the internet because people can read it all around the world.
I think Adventure Island was excellent because you can design your own island.
I don't know because I don't. x2
It is great fun and anyone can read your work.
You have spellcheck and different fonts to use to let other people see.
I like it that you don't have loads of sheets to look through: it's all saved on computer.
You can research easily.
It's a lot funner than proper writing/. A lot more people can read it around the country.
The difference between writing on the internet is it's a bit more fun because you can change the font and the colour of the writing.
You can write quicker and it is easier. X2
That maybe someone you don't know could be reading your work right now.
Things are different because you aren't just writing for the fun of it, you're writing for other people to read and look at.
It is different because you try your best to show off your writing skills and anyone can read it.



You have to type your idea and lots of people worldwide read it.
You can use links to let others choose the path taken. This should allow for more exciting storylines.
It is good because you can write what you want and can let your imagination run riot.
It's quicker and better.
You have a chance to show off your work to the world whereas on paper only your teacher and maybe your friends see it.

Conclusion: Something of a misunderstanding about the difference between using a word processor and writing on the internet. Wordprocessors are very popular as an alternative to handwriting!

7. What did you think about Adventure Island? Was it fun to write? Let us know what you think.

Adventure Island was great. I liked the fact it went on the internet.
It was excellent. I loved writing it.
It was brilliant and I liked the idea of the island map so you can pinpoint places.
It was a good thing to do, I found it very fun.
It was a good experience and was very enjoyable to read and write.
It was really good fun to write and plan ideas.
I think Adventure Island is brilliant now when we added to it. Also it was fun to write.
I thought that it was interesting and fun that you got to make up your own story and traps.
I think that Adventure Island was a great success through the whole school. I think it was fun to write.
It was excellent. To start off with I thought it would be boring but it was great.
I think it was fun to write because you could write traps and set the scene and describe what is around the character.
I think Adventure Island was good fun and was a great experience. I found interesting how our ideas linked.
I think it was great fun and it was a great social thing.
I think Adventure Island is great. It made writing on the internet fun to do. I thought that Adventure Island was a great way to do creative writing and experiencing how to write a game and it was fantastic to actually play the game you wrote.
Adventure Island was brilliant, it was fun to have your own co-ordinate to write about.
It was great writing Adventure Island because it's different than doing other writing.
Yes I did enjoy it because I was in a group with my best mates and it is different from working in a classroom. I really enjoyed doing this project.
Adventure Island was brilliant. I want to do something else like it now I am in Year 7. Inventing traps and thinking of riddles was the best.
I enjoyed creating Adventure Island thoroughly, but it lacked something, excitement. There was a huge island which didn't fulfill its potential.
I think Adventure Island was fun to write because the possibilities were unlimited.
I thought Adventure Island was good because we could work in pairs and it was fun to write.
Yes it was very fun to write as you could let your imagination run wild!

Conclusion: some seem to definitely get the point, one even thought it could go further....



Appendix 5: Example of downloadable teaching resource

kotn.ntu.ac.uk

**Notes for Teachers: Character Portraits
Year 3 Term 2 Objective – 8**

Aims

1. To describe the behaviour of people / creatures
2. To describe the characteristics of people / creatures

Resources

- ❖ Weblink: www.dragonsville.com/pool.htm
- ❖ Activity sheets: Character portraits
Lost poster

Introduction

This is an activity that will ask the children to describe the behaviour and characteristics of a dragon from the Naming Pool within Dragonsville by writing a short character portrait, as well as creating a lost poster.

Activities and points for discussion

- ❖ Look at the dragons within the gallery at the Naming Pool. Invite the children to say one thing they notice about a dragon, to describe it.
- ❖ Discuss with the children whether they are able to describe the behaviour of the dragons just from looking at the images. Could they predict the behaviour? Does the image help?
- ❖ Using published materials, read descriptions of characters from stories (e.g. The Iron Man)
- ❖ Look at the use of language in a character description. Is the character's name used all the time? What is used instead?
- ❖ What types of word are used in a character description (adjectives)? Why are these useful?
- ❖ Discuss what type of information you would need to write down if you wanted to describe the characteristics of a person / creature. Make a chart on the board / whiteboard.
- ❖ Ask the children to write a short character description of one of the dragons in the gallery using the points discussed before.
- ❖ Once the description has been written and edited have them submitted to the website.
- ❖ Discuss the use of a poster to help find a 'lost' pet. How does a poster describe a character in a few words? Explain how a keyword, (e.g. small, black, etc.) can be as effective as using a sentence (He has black fur and is small).
- ❖ Use the online flash activity to build a lost dragon poster (www.dragonsville.com/poster2.htm)

Follow Up

- ❖ Create western-style 'wanted' posters for nursery rhyme / fairy tale / story villains with brief character descriptions. Display these around the class / school.
- ❖ Try to describe a character using a limited number of words. Now try again using fewer words. In how few words can you effectively describe a character?
- ❖ Write a letter to a friend describing a dragon you have met in Dragonsville.
- ❖ Use an image of character. Label it so that it describes them.
- ❖ Write a monster portrait in the Monster Motel (kotn.ntu.ac.uk/motel)
- ❖ Visit the Kids' Castle and create character portraits of the people there. (kotn.ntu.ac.uk/castle)

Kids on the Net
www.kidsonthenet.com

eTeachers' Portal
www.eteachersportal.com

Writers for the Future
www.writersforthefuture.com

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