



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
April 2003-March 2005

by Helen Whitehead

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."



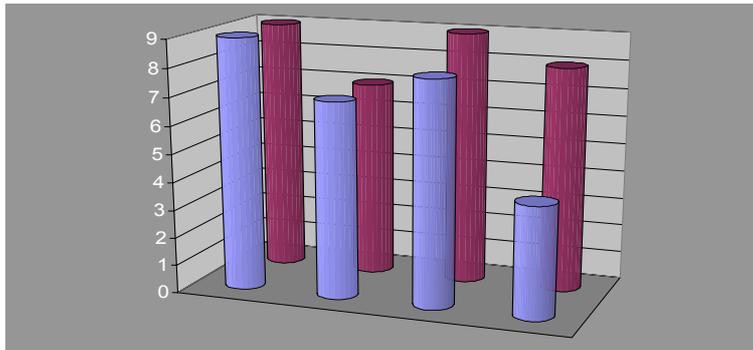
“Multi loves to paint ... She has three best friends named Pinky, Mysterize and Bossy Boots. ”

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

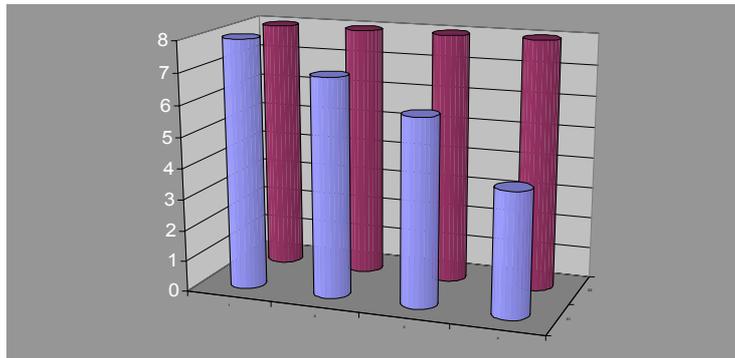
Teacher Skills

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 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%

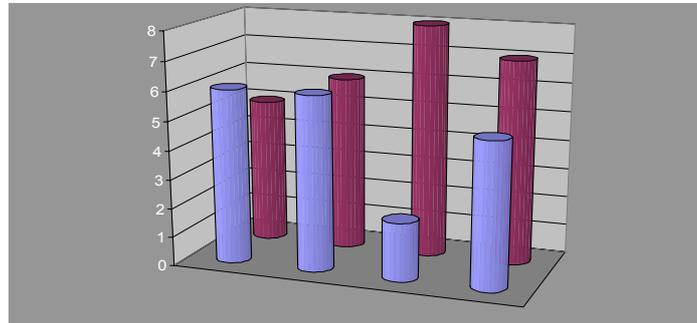


Also, as you can see from the second graph, below, teachers in the pilot group felt more confident to use ICT within their literacy lessons during, and after, the project, with an average increase of 40%. Once again the school on the left were using technology both before and after, but the teacher at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



Pupil Skills

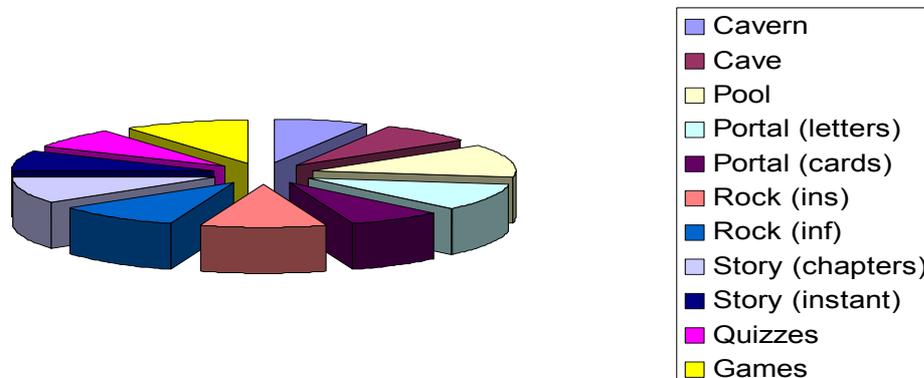
We also asked schools to give an average class figure for pupil confidence when using the Internet, ranging from 1 to 10.



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

Helen Whitehead, June 2005

kotn@ntu.ac.uk
helen@helenwhitehead.com

