ISSN 1467-9949

MAPE Newsletter

Autumn Term 2000
Newman College with MAPE

- Primary *PowerPoint*
- NRICH worksheets
- MAPE info
- Rosegrove Nursery website

Educating for the Third Millennium Conference, July 2000

Roger Keeling
Head of Maths and ICT at Newman College
R.Keeling@newman.ac.uk

Mid July 2000, Cheltenham, was the date and venue for the E3M Conference. The idea of a Conference bringing together the main professional associations involved in ICT was first mooted some four years earlier. At that time it was driven forward by the enthusiasm of Bill Tagg who sadly died before being able to see the fruition of his early efforts. And now it has been and gone. After numerous planning meetings some 200 plus delegates started arriving at CGCHE on the Thursday. The new building developments at the college together with the fine weather provided a positive ambience – aided undoubtedly by that end-of-term feeling. All the main ICT associations were represented and it was interesting for delegates to be able to mix with colleagues from primary, secondary, Higher Education and the advisory sectors. The programme consisted of a mixture of workshops, demonstrations and research papers plus keynote lectures from a Minister (Michael Wills), Gabriel Goldstein (Ofsted), Tim Brighouse (CEO, Birmingham LEA) and Sadie Plant (Warwick University). A major exhibition was also organised by BESA.

It is impossible to relate the contents of all the talks, but some of the key points/issues included:

- ICT is high on the agenda of government
- Teachers at the chalkface have to make things happen – and what teachers need is 'killer applications and killer ideas' (Gabriel)
- How do we sustain interest and investment after public spending initiatives expire?
- Above all schools need a shared vision

The overwhelming view of the delegates was that the Conference was a resounding success; everyone took away new ideas and were fired with fresh enthusiasm (even at this time in the year). The traditional barn dance filled the Friday evening and was followed, on the Saturday, by a Conference dinner at Cheltenham racecourse with a spectacular view from the top of the main grandstand. After-dinner entertainment was provided by Gervaise Finn, one time LEA advisor and Ofsted inspector who has now made a career shift to writing and radio work. His anecdotes from the classroom were brilliant and ones that we could all relate to. Definitely an end-of term feeling and the demand for a follow-up Conference (2004?). Watch this space . . .

The Structure of MAPE

From time to time people contact us who are unsure as to how MAPE works. Perhaps it is timely to inform new members and refresh the memories of existing members.

About MAPE

MAPE is a registered charity, and we exist as an organisation to promote and develop the awareness and effective use of ICT as an integral part of primary education.

We are all volunteers, fitting our work for MAPE alongside our paid employment.

MAPE's structure has been slimmed down recently and roles of some groups subsumed by others. The present groups consist of:

Projects and Innovations Group

These are the movers and shakers of MAPE. They dream up projects such as competitions and 'Sezoo, Sezyou'. The MAPE Focus on History featuring Sir Henry Unton was a brainchild Martin Ford, a member of this group.

Members meet once a term, on Saturdays, at Newman College, Birmingham.

If you want more information or would like to become more actively involved please contact Roger Keeling (R.Keeling@newman.ac.uk)

Publications Group

The Publications Group meets once a term and is responsible for planning future publications, often in association with the Projects and Innovations Group. You'd be surprised how fruitful our meetings can be! One person may have provided the inspiration for the publications you receive, but the contents are a collaborative effort.

Until recently we always met face to face, but we've found that evening telephone conferences are time efficient and mean that more members of the group can participate, but we still like to meet in person once a year.

If you would like to find out more about MAPE Publications Group please contact Rhona Dick (rhona@tagteacher.net)

Regional Network

At one time MAPE had a very active Regional Network. Recently, most areas have found it harder to tempt members to come to events. Exceptions to this are the very active Scottish membership, West Midlands MAPE and Northern MAPE. Members are welcome to attend any event in any region; information is to be found on the MAPE web site.

If you are interested in re-establishing a local group in your area do contact any of us.

MAPE Executive Committee

This group meets every term and is the guiding hand behind all MAPE activities.

MAPE National Council

This group meets once a year and consists of the Executive Committee plus members from the working groups and representatives from other regions, ensuring that the voice of MAPE's wider membership is heard.

MAPE is an organisation run by its members for its members.
That means YOU!

Many of us have been involved for some years. We are still very enthusiastic, but we need fresh (not necessarily young) blood to keep the impetus going. Additional help is always welcome; everyone has something to offer, even if it is only an idea that you feel sure is worth developing.

For anyone who would like to become more actively involved, MAPE does pay travelling expenses for members to attend meetings of Working Groups.

Get in touch.

MICROS AND PRIMARY EDUCATION

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 1999

	£	1999 £	1998 £	1998 £
Subscriptions		37,713		34,838
Surplus on sale of licences, tapes and magazines		5,463		237
		43,176		35,075
Return of capital on Halifax Group plc shares		736		—
Dividends received		241		286
Bank interest received		3,770		5,250
		47,923		40,611
Surplus/(deficiency) on conference		458		(4,023)
		48,381		36,588
LESS EXPENDITURE				
Publications	20,224		33,729	
Regional expenses	1,602		1,312	
Council expenses	6,935		5,424	
Administrative expenses	15,330		19,744	
Advertising	—		2,404	
Bank charges	1,126		1,035	
Direct debit charges	797		751	
Amortisation of sponsorship advance	3,333		—	
Depreciation office equipment	1,154		785	
		(50,501)		(65,184)
DEFICIT OF INCOME AGAINST EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR		(2,120)		(28,596)

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 DECEMBER 1999

	Notes	£	1999 £	£	1998 £
FIXED ASSETS	1				
Office equipment		3,462		2,355	
CURRENT ASSETS					
Sponsorship advance		6,667		10,000	
Debtors		315		5,605	
Cash at bank – current account		4,607		3,961	
Premium extra account		82,427		77,970	
Nationwide treasurer's account		1,049		1,000	
Cash in hand		98		48	
		95,163		98,584	
CURRENT LIABILITIES					
Creditors and accruals		(413)		(607)	
NET CURRENT ASSETS			94,750		97,977
TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES			98,212		100,332

REPRESENTED BY	1999 £	£	1998 £	£
Accumulated fund at 1 January 1999		100,332		128,928
Deficit of income Against expenditure for the year		(2,120)		(28,596)
Accumulated fund at 31 December 1999		98,212		100,332

FINANCIAL ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST DECEMBER 1999
FIXED ASSETS

COST	Office Equipment £
At 1 January 1999	13,937
Additions in year	2,261
At 31 December 1999	16,198
DEPRECIATION	
At 1 January 1999	11,582
Charge for year	1,154
At 31 December 1999	12,736
NET BOOK VALUE	
At 31 December 1998	3,462
At 31 December 1999	2,355

DEPRECIATION
Depreciation is charged on a reducing balance basis at the following rate:
[1]Office equipment 25%

BUILDING SOCIETY SHARES
The charity holds 1,092 shares in Halifax Group plc (1998 – 1181 shares).
At 31 December 1999 these shares had a market value of £7,502 (£6.87 per share).

The SITES – M2 Study

Summary

MAPE is currently represented on the national panel of a project which is looking at classrooms at the leading edge of using ICT to enhance teaching and learning. England is one of several countries participating in this international study which focuses on innovative pedagogical practices using technology. It will involve case studies in primary and secondary schools using data collected by means of interviews, classroom observations and the examination of schools' documents.

Background

The United Kingdom has a long tradition of being at the forefront of innovation in educational uses of information and communications technology but, to date, very little data has been collected in a form which facilitates direct comparisons between England and other countries. The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) is currently organising a major international comparative study – the Second Information Technology in Education Study (SITES) – which is designed to collect detailed information about ICT practices in schools in the participating countries. The first module of the SITES project involved collection of quantitative data; the UK did not participate in that part of the study, although about thirty countries were involved. The second module of the study is concerned with the collection of qualitative data, and focuses specifically on Innovative Pedagogical Practices Using Technology (IPPUTS). Countries

that did not take part in Module 1 are not barred from participation in Module 2, and England is one of the countries involved in this component of the study.

Aims

The main aims of the international research include:

- to identify and describe innovative pedagogical practices that use technology;
- to inform practices related to ICT;
- to provide teachers and other practitioners with information that they can use to improve classroom practices;
- to add to the body of research knowledge and theory about the factors across countries that contribute to the successful and sustained use of innovative technology-based pedagogical practices.

The collection of qualitative data within an international forum will provide valuable information to supplement and extend the national data, and allow national practices to be set within the international context. More specifically, the data collection is intended to provide evidence to answer the following research questions:

- What are the innovative pedagogical practices in which teachers use ICT? Why are they working?
- How do these practices change what teachers do in the classroom?
- How do these innovations change what students do in the classroom?
- What impact do these practices have on student outcomes? How have they changed the way outcomes are assessed?
- Which national and school policies related to staff development, internet access etc. are potentially effective in supporting these innovations?

Methods

The research will be carried out by means of case studies in classrooms. The international guidelines require at least one school from the primary and secondary phases respectively to be studied. For the study in England, six case studies will be carried out, three in each of the above phases. The national panel (on which MAPE is represented) has been involved in helping to identify schools and classrooms where such practices can be found, and will eventually be asked to agree on those which will form the case studies.

Prior to the main phase of school-based work (September 2000–April 2001), a pilot study was carried out in one classroom, followed by data analysis and liaison with the IEA. This will help to ensure that the national definitions of IPPUTs are relevant and appropriate.

The case studies will include the following elements of data collection:

- interviews with headteachers, teachers, students, and where relevant, parents and other community members;
- collection of documentation including policy documents, curriculum materials, teaching notes, and assessment instruments;
- collection of materials such as student projects, test results, student-generated web sites;
- classroom observations focusing on teacher and student interactions, and noting seating arrangements, location of computers and other equipment, use of resources.

This information will be collected by means of school visits conducted over at least five days per school.

Outcomes

Each of the case studies will be reported in detail. The national data will also contribute to the international report which will be published by the IEA.

For further information contact
Heather Govier, MAPE Chair
hgovier@argonet.co.uk

The Rosegrove Nursery website

Barry Wake
University College Worcester

On a quiet, ordinary, steady-as-she-goes sort of day, out of the blue came an email message on the MAPE Council circuit: 'If you haven't seen this site yet, you're in for a treat!' And we were!

Primary schools are increasingly creating their own web sites, but just as in the whole world of ICT, the same rule applies: very few Early Years resources. Even nowadays, in fact, it must be somebody's law

somewhere, that: *the younger the child, the less there is on the Net.* But the Rosegrove Nursery site is one of the very few exceptions, and an outstanding exception at that.

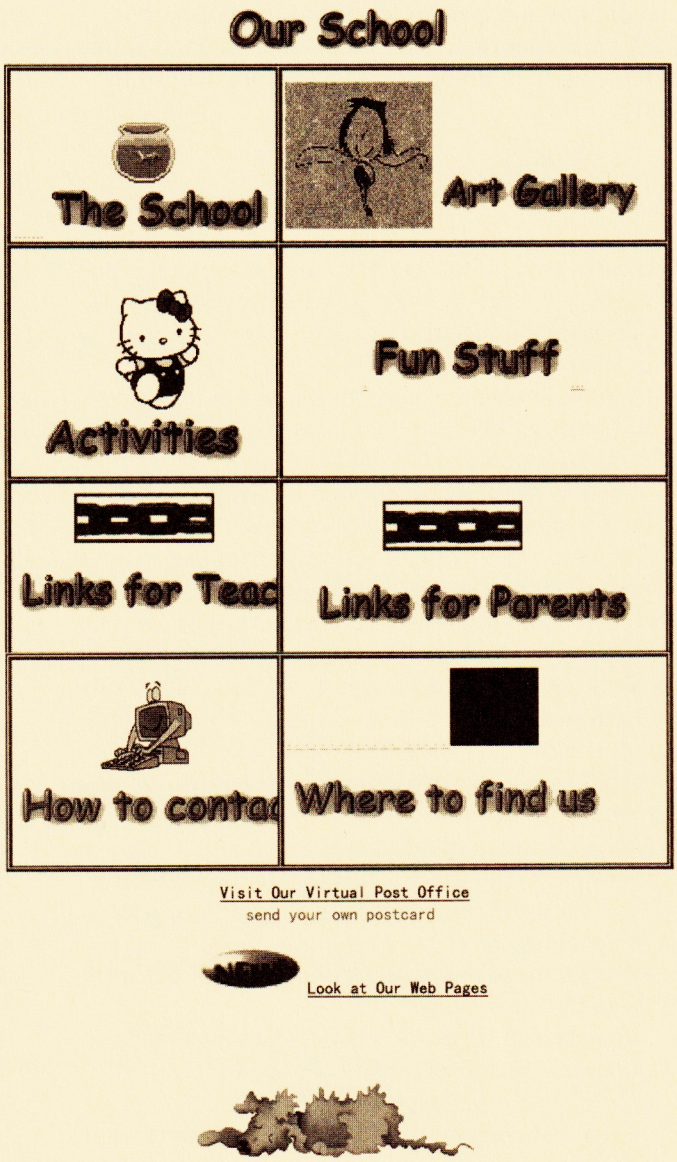
The Web Site

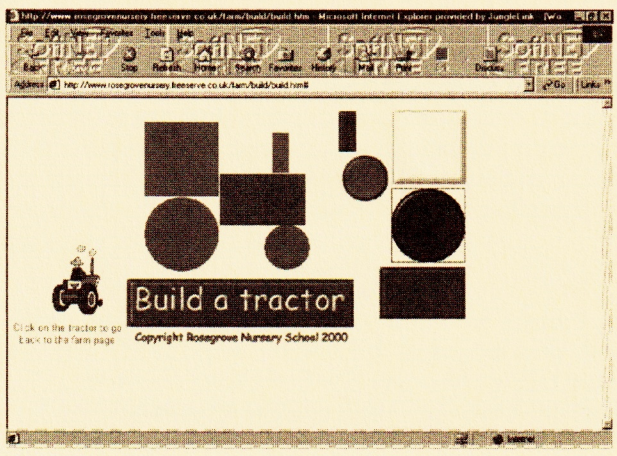
After the introductory name plaque of the school, the next screen has an airplane leaving behind its 'Welcome' message as it flies, with Scruffy the 'guide' dog barking below. Here there are hotlinks to the children's own web pages, for example, and to another screen with a menu of information about the school, the children's current art gallery, activities and topics, links to other early years' sites, interesting and useful links for teachers and for parents (take the Lancashire Hotspots for instance), plus ways of contacting the school and a map of its location. Most sections have an animated icon, such as a tractor in the farm activities, to provide an additional, recognisable link to where you are.

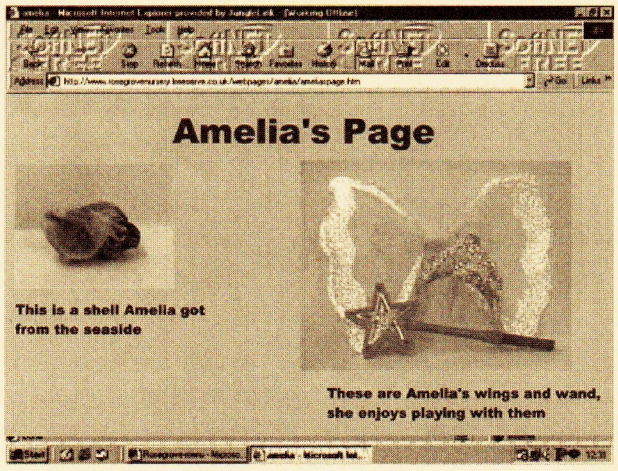
The school section gives some useful information not just about the curriculum, but term dates, medical information, a photo of the school and so on. Strangely there are no facts and figures about the staff, the number of children or their actual ages. But the Art Gallery has some superb examples of the older children's paintings of pigs. Evidently farms are important to the Rosegrove children, because one of the topics in the Activity area is 'On the Farm' where there are poems and photographs, songs and worksheets, which can be downloaded. There are also on-screen interactive activities such as jigsaws and identifying farmyard animal sounds. In the counting games, the numbers are spoken in a child's delightful Lancashire accent, too!

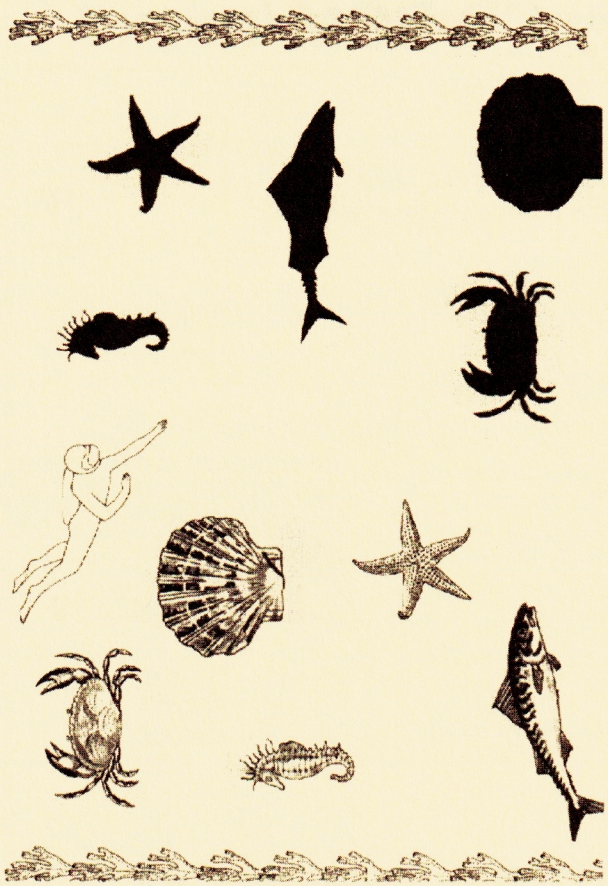
Other topics such as The Seaside or Minibeasts similarly contain songs and poems, artwork by the children as well as activity sheets that can be printed off.

One of the most exciting areas is that of the children's own web pages. With the use of a digital camera and some parental technical expertise, a group of children had designed their own pages with images and accompanying text of things that are important to them, from their favourite food to their favourite bedtime story. It doubtless takes a huge amount of time and hard work but the gain in the children's self-esteem, as well









as a developing understanding of what the Web is and how it works must be tremendous.

Some quibbles

Against a yardstick of perfection (because you can do anything on a computer, can't you . . . ?) there are a few minor inconsistencies. Scruffy the linking 'guide' dog, for example, is not always available to take you back to the home page. It takes a few goes to get the hang of how the various sections are joined together. It looks as if the whole site, rather like Topsy, just grew and grew. There are occasional errors in the text (and perhaps we should campaign to avoid using the apostrophe altogether). Not all the poems are credited, and in the songs the music does not always match the words properly. When I looked there didn't seem to be any links to Argosphere or to Kent's NatureGrid, or to the MAPE site either but then everyone has his or her own 'favorites'.

The above are really more niggles than criticisms. Yet to say that the site itself is well-constructed, informative, educational, interactive with excellent graphics, sound, animation, relevant and appropriate content, misses the point – it's the imaginative use of the medium in a really exciting and innovative way that sets it apart. Behind it all there is the sense of a deep commitment to early years children, and to an appreciation of both their needs and the importance of their being valued. For the children, and their friends and relations, to see their work so vividly on display at school and at home, to join in the same activities at school and at home must reinforce the idea of partnership as well as the notion of 'any time, any place' learning.

Some implications

Now that schools, including those for the youngest children, are beginning to use the 'value-addedness' of ICT and make web sites of such high quality that are more than simply 'on-line brochures', there are various issues that need thinking about.

- Who is the site for? Children, parents, teachers, governors, prospective parents, the community? If so, how do you accommodate all the various levels of interest and experience?
- Must all schools have a website? If so, do they need website managers? Does that mean teachers? Can schools always rely on experienced and enthusiastic staff, parents and friends or will they have to buy in expertise?
- How is the site to be managed? Who decides on the content and structure?
- How much educational content should there be? Do schools need to re-invent the wheel, when the National Grid for Learning, and the BBC Education sites, to name but two, can call upon such extensive resources?
- How much time, effort and cost should schools give to their website? (Rosegrove make discrete use of a few advertisements themselves.)
- And how soon will it be before OFSTED add the school website to their tick list?
- Lastly, what are the effects on the home/school partnership? Does it increase the 'digital divide'? Or will it break down the walls between home and school with an increasing awareness of lifelong and flexible learning, independent of time or place?

At the East Midlands ICT Conference in July 2000, Chris Flanagan described his school's five-year development of their website. He noted the importance of planning and of involving as many as practicable to share the tasks. For him, a school website could provide a range of learning opportunities, facilitate communication, and enhance teaching and professional development. At the same time, it could extend the traditional boundaries becoming an interactive community resource.

Above all, Chris maintained, it should be enjoyable to make and enjoyable to use. The latter certainly applies to the Rosegrove Nursery site. But don't just take my word for it. There is more than described above, and you need to have a long look for yourself. It really will be a treat, honest!

Rosegrove Nursery Website is at:
http://www.rosegrovenursery.freeserve.co.uk

Chris Flanagan is head of Sutton-on-Sea Primary School and their website is at:
http://www.sutton.lincs.sch.uk

MAPE Focus on History CD-ROM Index

When the CD-ROM was in preparation it wasn't possible to include an index.
One is now available on the MAPE website. A printable version is also available.

www.mape.org.uk/kids/unton/cdindex.htm

If you do not have access to the internet you can get a copy of the index by sending a floppy disk and stamped addressed envelope to:

Rhona Dick, 121 Fitz Roy Avenue, Harborne, Birmingham B17 8RG

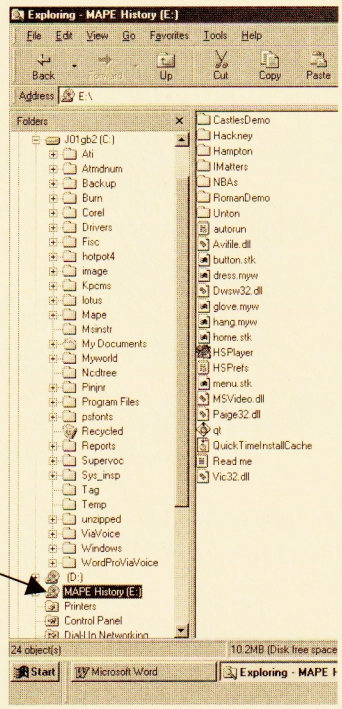
When I was preparing the index I tried to run the CD on my laptop and got the following message:

'Sorry this version of HyperStudio requires QuickTime3.0 to be installed on your computer'

It occurred to me that there may be members who have seen this message and thought they would be unable to use the CD.
This is what to do!

Click **OK**
Leave the CD in the drive
Click **Start** (with the Windows icon at the bottom left of the screen)
Select **Programs**
Click **Windows Explorer**
Select the drive containing the CD-ROM
(In this example, E.)

Click on the MAPE History icon.



The contents of the CD-ROM will appear on the right of the screen.

QuickTime

Locate and click on the QuickTime icon
Follow the on-screen instructions to install QuickTime.

Using *PowerPoint* in the primary classroom

Roy Topping
Halsnead C.P School, Whiston, Merseyside

I have been using *PowerPoint* with my Year 4 pupils throughout the year and have found it to be an extremely effective teaching tool.

I introduced the children to the program in groups of three and allowed them to produce a presentation on any topic they chose – these ranged from dinosaurs to Star Wars. The objective here was not to develop research skills but to have the children become familiar with the individual components of *PowerPoint* such as slide selection, slide addition, background selection and transition effects. It only took a short while for the children to become competent in the basic skills required to run *PowerPoint* and they soon began to work independently. Once the children can use the program confidently then I utilise it in a number of ways.

Within the Literacy Hour I have used *PowerPoint* to support learning during the independent group work section, especially when undertaking grammar-based activities, as I find that it encourages the children to

look closely at the lesson's content. For instance if the lesson was based on the use of the apostrophe then the *PowerPoint* group would be required to produce a short presentation, with examples, of the rules governing apostrophe use. The group would then show their presentation to the rest of the class during the plenary session.

In History and Geography I use *PowerPoint* as a motivational tool to develop research skills. The work encompasses all areas of *PowerPoint* and usually takes several sessions to complete; the majority of children are more than willing to continue this work during break times. Once the children have been allocated their topic they have to research it using CD-ROMs and reference material from the school library. After they have acquired the relevant information then work on the slide show can begin. The presentations consist of slides which show bullet points, organisation charts and graphs with differing backgrounds and transition effects. To go with these presentations the children produce a script which expands on the content of each slide. Once the slide show has been completed and the script prepared then the children present their *PowerPoint* presentation to the rest of the class.

I believe that it is important for the children to have an audience for their finished work. Usually this is in the form of a classroom display which allows other members of the class and visitors to the classroom to view it. *PowerPoint,* though, can be displayed to a far greater audience. I incorporated *PowerPoint* into a recent assembly through the use of a Smartboard increasing the children's potential audience from thirty to over three hundred. The children spoke clearly and confidently as they went through each of their presentations before their large audience.

I have also used *PowerPoint* during Open Night. Prior to Open Night each child prepared a *PowerPoint* slide with a message to their respective parents or guardians; no sound effects were allowed! These slides were then placed in a loop and were played continually throughout the evening. The children enjoyed producing their slides which the parents in turn enjoyed reading.

PowerPoint has encouraged my pupils to improve their research skills, provided motivation, improved confidence and helped develop ICT skills. Without doubt *PowerPoint* has been of great benefit in my teaching.

ArgoSphere

MAPE members will remember that ArgoSphere sponsored the very successful MAPE Focus on Literacy, published in Autumn 1998.

ArgoSphere is the UK's longest established dedicated education website. Packed with fun and challenging activities ArgoSphere has become a favourite with pupils, teachers and parents. New content by leading educational software authors is regularly added, categorised by age suitability. Recent additions to ArgoSphere have been quizzes for 8–11-year-olds and teenagers and the latest 'Beyond Time' adventure.

Visit the substantial free section of ArgoSphere at www.argosphere.net and enjoy favourite activities like Pooh Country and Bo Bear. A full annual ArgoSphere subscription for use throughout the school, and including use by staff away from school, is only £120 (excluding VAT). MAPE members qualify for a £20 reduction, to £100 for a whole-school annual licence, by quoting their membership number at the time of ordering.

Contact details:

Website – www.argosphere.net
Email – enquiries@argosphere.net

MAPE Focus on From Home to School

Next year MAPE plans to publish a Focus on From Home to School. If anyone has experience of using ICT in home/school education and would like to share it with other members please contact:

Barry Wake – b.wake@worcs.junglelink.co.uk
Sally Smith – staff@phoenix.nottscc.gov.uk or
Rhona Dick – rhona@tagteacher.net

***Easiteach* from RM**

Have you seen Easiteach? Look out for a review of this in next term's MAPE Magazine. In the meantime take a look at www.easiteach.com for more details.

Making your own worksheets using the NRICH Primary Website

Mike Freedman
ICT Co-ordinator/Year 5 Team Leader, Bushey Middle School, London Borough of Merton

In this activity you will learn how to extract text and images from a website and use Microsoft *Word* to incorporate them into your own printed worksheets for pupils to use. A specific example is given but the principles apply to using any web based materials in your own resource bank. You could use any word processor or indeed any computer platform (e.g. PC, Apple, Acorn) in which case the detailed steps might be slightly different.

- Access the NRICH Primary website (www.nrich.maths.org.uk and click on the link to primary in the top left hand corner).
- On the lighthouse choose LIBRARY which will take you to the collection of past activities.
- The Library Index page has a section called TOPIC TREE. In this section follow the link to INVESTIGATION then the links to SPACE … SQUARES and, finally, COLOURING TRIANGLES. This is an investigation into symmetrical colouring patterns.
- Hover your mouse over the diagram of triangles and click the right button. On the *context menu* (that's what it's called) click the item **Save picture as …**
- A **save as …** dialogue will open. Save the picture in a convenient place on your computer's hard drive.
- Without closing down NRICH open a new blank MS *Word* document. You can switch between the web page and the document by clicking on their entries on the task bar. On the webpage, use the mouse to highlight the text of the problem. While it is highlighted hold the ctrl key (either one will do) and press and release the c key. The ctrl/c key combination copies the text into your computer's memory (it goes into an area known as 'the clipboard'). Now change to the word document and press the combination ctrl/v which will paste the contents of the clipboard into the Word document.
- Move the cursor to the place where you would like to insert the diagram. On Word's drop down **Insert** menu choose **Picture …** and you will get the insert dialogue. Use it to find the picture that you saved and select it. At the side of the dialogue select the option to 'float over text' and click on the **Insert** button. (The float over text option makes it possible to drag the picture easily from one position on the page to another.)
- You now have the basis for a worksheet based on the NRICH page …

Editing task 1

- Change the text so that it is more accessible for less accomplished readers, e.g. change some of the wording/complete sentences/adjust paragraphing/change font and size.
- Add a title
- Print the finished worksheet.

Editing task 2

- Re-edit the worksheet so that it is suitable for more accomplished mathematicians. Add one or more extension questions (such as those in the teachers' notes) and an extension activity.
- Print the finished worksheet.

Skills involved

- Saving a graphic image from a website to a local hard disc.
- Inserting an image into a document.
- Copying text to the clipboard.
- Pasting text from the clipboard.
- Editing captured text.

These skills are useful both to you as a teacher and to pupils when using the internet or CD-ROMs for their own research topics.

Reviews

Making Multimedia in the Classroom – A Teachers' Guide
Vivi Lachs
Routledge-Falmer 2000
ISBN 0-415-21684-2
£19.99

Multimedia authoring is the focus of Unit 6A of the DfEE Scheme of Work for IT for KS2. It provides opportunities for developing presentations which use many techniques for communicating information and involve careful consideration of audience, content and quality. However, inspection data shows that this work is not taking place in a majority of classrooms – it is an application of ICT which is still under-used in schools.

Vivi Lachs' book is essential reading for all teachers wishing to develop this part of the curriculum. It is a powerful rationale for the use of multimedia authoring based on

extensive experience in a range of classrooms at primary and secondary level. The guide offers a theoretical basis, detailed practical advice and many classroom examples of children using images, text, sound and video to produce multimedia presentations as an integrated part of their curriculum work.

Each chapter covers a different aspect of multimedia authoring including:

- planning projects which are integrated into the curriculum in a variety of subjects;
- considering audience, interactivity and design;
- classroom management including organising groups, facilitating collaboration and making time;
- assessment and evaluation;
- choosing software and resources.

The book is clearly and attractively presented with copious classroom examples and comes with a CD-ROM showing the work which has been produced in the projects described.

The main reasons that multimedia authoring is not extensively used in the curriculum are the problems of space and time. These issues are not ducked in the book with a full chapter devoted to them. Vivi presents strategies for multimedia authoring in a one-computer classroom or a separate computer room. She accepts that it probably does take more time than traditional methods of teaching and presentation but argues (powerfully) that the benefits of spending this extra time really are substantial.

For a taster see Vivi's piece in section D of the MAPE Focus on Science. If you like the taste, buy the book. You might just be inspired to have a go.

Twisted Tales

Granada Learning
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I meant to write this review twelve months ago. At the BETT exhibition in January 1999 one piece of software that caught my eye was a pilot version of a CD-ROM from SEMERC/Granada Learning containing a rendition of *The Pardoner's Tale* by Chaucer. This was to be part of a series of stories for children across Key Stages One and Two, under the general heading of *Twisted Tales*. What made it different was that it was a narrated story, told by a skilled storyteller, Roger Hurn. The screen consisted of a rather sombre picture (in keeping with the general tenor of the story), which was updated periodically, while a small video of Mr Hurn played in the bottom left hand corner. I could easily have dismissed the idea as a poor relation of *Jackanory* – the video refresh rate was below the quality one would expect in a TV picture, sometimes creating that minor sense of irritation or discomfort one feels when the lip-sync goes; the pictures were a bit static, and might be thought of as unadventurous in these days of computer animation and all-singing all-dancing 'talking books' – and yet I was struck by the sheer quality of the tale itself and its mode of rendition. Let's face it, most 'talking books' do not really pass muster as literary texts, however amusing and motivating they might be, but Chaucer for tinies? Wow.

Then not much seemed to happen for a while, and I wondered if the series would ever see the light of day. Five titles are now available, for PC or Mac (see factfile): *The Pardoner's Tale, Nathan and the Devil* (a Jamaican folk tale), *The Wreckers and the Brockley Jack* (a poetry compilation), *The Tiger and the Man* (an Indian folk tale), and *The Fisherman and his Wife* (a Russian folk tale). The prices are slightly higher than originally planned, but I think they still represent good value for money.

Stories last between 10 and 20 minutes, and users can start and finish at any point. The publishers intend that they should be used during the third section of the Literacy Hour, when children are engaged in independent or group work. I actually think they have a wider applicability than that.

They are intended for use from Years 1–6, and each CD includes teachers' notes and suggested activities and worksheets linked to Literacy Hour themes for each term of each year. Additionally, the stories are provided in printable format in two versions: the full text, and a simplified version for emergent readers. All the printable parts are in Adobe *Acrobat* format; they use a very legible font, and, with the aid of a decent printer, will provide a very worthwhile classroom resource. Though I found a few of the suggested activities rather dull and uninspiring, the majority are thoughtful, interesting, and appropriately challenging.

A good storyteller in a live performance develops a rapport with the audience, makes eye contact, responds to the listeners' reactions, and conveys extra meanings through a subtle and complex body-language for which we do not have adequate words; a virtual storyteller cannot expect to do any of these things. Mr Hurn is very good, however, and through clever use of expression and variations in pitch and pace he manages to convey many of the subtleties of the tales. We should not dismiss these qualities lightly. The Literacy Hour is under-specified in terms of speaking and listening. Neither should we underestimate the possibilities presented by having whole tales to work with, rather than a seemingly interminable succession of short extracts, which often seem to be there merely as fodder for 'work' on adverbs or whatever. I can think of very few pieces of software that can support text-level work effectively, and for this reason these CD-ROMs are very welcome.

There is another dimension to be considered. I passed copies of the CD-ROMs to a group of mature students, for their children to try out at home. The response was polite, but mostly negative. 'Boring' was a word used more than once. My first reaction was to be disappointed, but then I thought a little harder about it. Yes, in the context of what passes as home software, the *Twisted Tales* probably are pretty boring. They don't really *do things*, and that's what software is supposed to be like, isn't it?

The home market is full of what has come to be known as 'edutainment' software. I think conscientious teachers should be slightly wary of it; it's rather easy to be seduced by whizzy graphics and funny noises, and by the obvious enthusiasm they engender in children, and to lose sight of what you believe about how learning happens best. As a general rule, be a bit suspicious of any software that claims to 'make learning fun'. Niel McLean, in his keynote speech at this year's BETT exhibition, outlined some differences between home software and educational software, thus:

Home software	*Educational software*
Encourages user to stay on computer	Encourages user to examine other sources
Emphasises speed and activity	Emphasises reflection and understanding
Includes features to attract attention	Avoids distracting features
Encourages leaping from topic to topic	Encourages engagement in depth
Is used by individuals	Supports individual, pair and group work
Is self-contained.	Allows the teacher to intervene to consolidate learning and assess progress.

I think it is fairly obvious on which side the *Twisted Tales* belong.

I hinted above that I thought the tales could be used in a wider context; what I had in mind, for those fortunate enough to have some means to project or display a large screen image visible to the whole class, is the first half of the Literacy Hour. There is scope for a whole range of text or meta-narrative work:

- Listen, observe, and discuss as a class: how does the storyteller convey different moods, or portray characteristics of the people in the story?
- Look carefully at the illustration while the story is being told. Why did the artist draw it in this way? What does it add to the story that is not conveyed in the spoken narrative?
- Can you predict when the picture will change? How?
- Listen to the story while reading the simplified version. What has been left out? Would you have simplified it in that way?

And so forth. If using ICT for whole-class interactive teaching is not an option, most of the above could also be undertaken by groups or even individuals, though I firmly believe that the richest discussions happen when adult mediation is available.

My one regret is that the stories are not also supplied as plain text files, because that would open up a whole range of other possibilities (e.g. making your own abridgements, adding your own illustrations, re-casting parts of the story as a playscript). You can extract text from Adobe Acrobat files, but it does not always behave as you expect it to (particularly if the text is in two columns).

I think this is a very valuable resource, and I hope the series is extended in the future.

Factfile

Twisted Tales CD-ROMs from Granada Learning:
http://www.granadalearning.com; tel: 0161 827 2927
Single User Licence for PC/Mac @ £20 per tale; additional user licences @ £10; multi-user CD-ROMs @ £10.
Niel McLean's slides are at:
http://www.becta.org.uk/news/keynotes/bett2000/teskeynote/index.html
Though they may not mean very much without the provision of accompanying notes.

FlexiTREE

MAPE has spent some time trying to develop a user-friendly branching database. We could have saved ourselves a lot of time and effort. Flexible Software Ltd. has achieved just what we aimed to do, and more!

The program comes on a 3.5in floppy disk and is very simple to install.

The menu offers the options of

- Work with an old tree
- Create a new tree
- Tell me about the program
- Finish the program

Each of these can be accessed using a mouse or the keyboard.

The screens are all uncluttered and the program comes with a range of fonts to suit all needs; it is not, however, possible to change the colour of the text. There is only one ready-made file – fruit – although the easy-to-understand manual provides lots of ideas.

The National Curriculum for Key Stage 2 Science suggests that 'Pupils could use a branching database to develop and use keys' (p. 86) and the National Numeracy Strategy Framework for teaching Mathematics identifies branching databases as one means of developing children's mathematical language, logical thinking and problem solving skills (Section 2, p. 31). Creating branching databases develops so many skills that teachers shouldn't feel they are limited to these two curricular areas.

Clare (Year 5) tried this program for me. She will forgive me for saying that she doesn't always find spelling easy. With most data handling programs, where correct spelling is essential, this can be a major drawback. We soon found, however, that *FlexiTREE* is equipped with a spell-check facility. Other features include automatic addition of a question mark and automatic capitalisation at the start of a question.

This program scores particularly highly on its ease of editing. Mistakes can be rectified simply, and by using the back button it is easy to return to earlier screens. Changes can be made at the end so that a tree can 'grow' and more sophisticated ideas can be developed, for example pictures or comments can be added. This is not just a gimmick – it may be necessary to aid identification. Clare imported pictures from a CD-ROM into her file of musical instruments.

Helpful messages guide you through the process if you do make a mistake. Another nice touch is the way the screens slide as you progress giving the impression that you are climbing the tree.

The program will also tell you how efficient you tree is, in other words how many questions have you asked to enable you to identify an object compared with the optimum. This is a good feature, enabling users to modify and improve their classification skills. And of course you can print out your tree at the end.

Clare found this program particularly easy to use, and in no time was able to create a fairly sophisticated branching database independently.

I have absolutely no hesitation in recommending this program. It represents excellent value for money, and should be in every school.

Factfile

Flexible Software Ltd, PO Box 100, Abingdon, Oxon OX13 6PQ
Email: sales@flexible.co.uk
http://www.flexible.co.uk

FlexiTREE will run on any IBM-compatible microcomputer running Windows 3.1/3.11, Windows 95/98/2000 or Windows NT 3.5/4.0. The program requires the minimum RAM for each version of Windows, 4Mb of available hard disk space and VGA 640x480 graphics (or better).

There are separate versions for stand-alone and for network computers. The network version works on Novell, RM Net 2, Net 3, Net LM and RM Connect.

Prices **include** post and packing (within the UK), but **exclude** VAT.

Single machine licence	£28
Two machine licence	£42
Four machine licence	£56
Eight machine licence	£70
Sixteen machine licence	£84
Thirty two machine licence	£112
Primary school site licence	£84
Middle school site licence	£112
Secondary school site licence	£140
Additional booklets	£4

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