

MediaStage

Developed by Immersive Education with research support from Futurelab, MediaStage is a fully immersive 3D production studio that puts control of scenery, props, actors, cameras and lights into the hands of learners. MediaStage is now available for schools and colleges to buy from Heinemann. For more details see www.immersiveeducation.com, or read here about the research findings that have underpinned the development of the project.



Team

Donna Burton-Wilcock, Director of Education, Immersive Education
Cotham School, Bristol
Futurelab



Virtual actors

Outline

MediaStage starts from the premise that we can use technology that is normally used to create typical, 3D viewpoint 'shoot-'em-up' games for education. The aim is to put the power of the software into the hands of learners to create their own interactive visions. It is a world simulator. The built-in real physics of objects, movement through 3D space, and the ability to animate virtual actors provide a narrative story telling tool that is unique.

As a first step towards unleashing this potential, Immersive Education, in collaboration with Futurelab, developed a prototype that creates a virtual TV studio. This virtual studio has a range of scenes, props and a cast of actors who can move and speak. The actors can adopt general behaviours like affectionate or aggressive and carry through these behaviours in body language when moving or speaking. Students can put their own voice or pre-recorded voices into the mouths of actors.

Learning Research Objectives

MediaStage is potentially a powerful tool for young people and teachers to create narratives, documentaries, sketches and reflections on ideas. As such, it is not intended (at least in its current form) to 'teach' specific skills or content area. Rather, our collaboration in this area

was around identifying how a powerful new tool for communication and creativity might be used in schools.

The focus for the research on the MediaStage project, therefore, was to identify:

- 1 How MediaStage might support children's communication and creative processes.
- 2 How MediaStage might be used across the curriculum, and within English as a specific subject area.
- 3 How the design of MediaStage might be improved to further support children's working processes.

Research and development process

While Immersive had been developing MediaStage for some time, Futurelab became involved in 2003 in order to bring the experiences of teachers and learners to bear on the development process. As a first stage, Futurelab ran a teacher workshop, with nine teachers from English, history, citizenship, drama and media studies subject areas, and the designers and educational advisors from Immersive.

The second phase comprised a six week design research study at Cotham School in Bristol, where the learning research

team from Futurelab and the education and design team from Immersive worked with an English teacher and 15 Year 8 students on a sustained curriculum activity. The students worked in groups of three to develop virtual inserts for regional television news. This provided the students with lots of scope for expression and demonstrated their understanding of genre and the ways in which particular media forms can be used to represent their ideas.

Findings

Several key areas were worthy of attention:

- 1 In the design of tools to support creative production it seems clear now that we need to exploit the potential of working in a non-linear fashion offered by digital technologies. Combining editing, scripting and performance processes, rather than separating these out into different stages, is clearly supported by the technology and actively exploited by today's school children.
- 2 Teachers, particularly in the English and media studies departments, saw clear uses for a tool such as this for all ages. Teachers in citizenship saw potential applications for international collaboration, and teachers in history saw its potential for recreating and reflecting on different historical interpretations.

What the MediaStage research forces us to ask is, when we have these tools available in schools – how best can we support children to become creative producers of digital resources, and how can we enable teachers to collaborate on these activities across the curriculum?

Partners

The development of MediaStage is based on Immersive's use of technical and design platforms pioneered by the computer games industry and uses conventional PC technology.

MediaStage was developed by Immersive Education, with financial and research support from Futurelab. Immersive Education is a global education publishing business based in Oxford and London. It develops innovative software solutions for use by teachers, pupils and parents, designed for schools and homes. Immersive Education also publishes curriculum-based offline support materials for teaching in the form of lesson plans, activity suggestions and units of work that function alongside its software platforms.

Where MediaStage is now

Immersive Education has worked with Heinemann, examination boards and further trial schools to build a GCSE Media Studies Curriculum around the software. This provides a text book for each of the two major examination syllabi in England and Wales. The books come with many example MediaStage files of media genre - soap operas, news stories, drama, adverts and so on. The examination boards have accepted that student work created in MediaStage will be acceptable as coursework for their GCSE assessment. This is a considerable achievement and a major step in the use of ICT in the classroom.



Screen shot from performance



Stage set interface



Contacts

Immersive Education:
Donna Burton-Wilcock,
www.immersiveeducation.com
Futurelab: Martin Owen,
martin.owen@futurelab.org.uk

Futurelab
1 Canons Road
Harbourside
Bristol
BS1 5UH
United Kingdom

tel +44 (0) 117 915 8200
www.futurelab.org.uk