

Create-A-Scape

Mediascapes are a potentially powerful way of engaging with the world around us. Using PDAs they offer new opportunities to explore and interact with the landscape in exciting and varied ways. The Create-A-Scape website project aims to offer the inspiration for teachers and pupils to start using mediascapes, and to provide easy-to-use guides and free software to help make mediascape creation as simple and accessible as possible.



Team
Futurelab



Technology
HP Mediascape Authoring Toolkit
PDA running Pocket PC
Headphones
GPS (optional)
Windows PC

Outline

'Mediascape' (or 'scape') is a term used to describe a collection of location-sensitive sounds and images that are placed in local landscapes that can then be experienced via a PDA hand-held computer and headphones.

Inspired by Futurelab's Mudlarking in Deptford project (www.futurelab.org.uk/showcase) where the students loved using state-of-the-art mobile technology to design and produce their own guided tour, we are trying to expand the world of mediascapes more widely and make them accessible to schools that have basic PDA kit available to them.

Although creating your own mediascape may seem difficult, it can actually be straightforward with the right software and instructions. Using the mediascape toolkit developed by HP Labs, we aim to make mediascape creation accessible to students 10 years old or over, and also to teachers and ICT coordinators. The resources support them to overcome technical challenges, and also provide inspiration and support to start using mediascapes in the classroom.

Learning and Teaching Approach

Developing a mediascape is an active and creative endeavour that results in the creation of new and original learning experiences and resources. The process of making a mediascape promotes the active engagement of learners in both the conceptual design and content authoring, as well as in the technical processes required to complete a mediascape.

With a little imagination and effort it is easy to envisage the great potential mediascapes have for a huge range of learning experiences. Whether they are produced to capture and embed individual or collective narratives, factual or historical information, to enable creative expression, or to present other located stimuli, it is clear mediascapes can enable learners to build memorable and engaging resources.

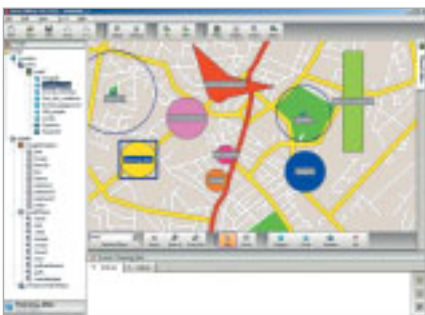
Creating mediascapes is an activity worth pursuing as it emphasises the challenges of content production and creation that learners find motivating and empowering and which can be built upon their existing knowledge, interests and cultural backgrounds. The completed resources may also make a welcome addition to the range of learning resources already available.

Development Process

Creating mediascapes can involve a number of disparate steps which could become a complicated process. Our aim was to make this process simple and accessible. With HP's Mediascape Authoring Toolkit and freely available media creation tools as our starting point, and using a user-centred development process, we embarked on understanding the various steps that users go through when making mediascapes and the kinds of support that they needed along the way. We ran workshops with Year 6 children and teaching professionals, observing them making their first scapes. We interviewed schools and LEAs to understand the environment in which PDAs would need to be supported, and negotiated the complex world of Ordnance Survey to try to provide a navigable route for teachers to obtain free digital maps to use in the scapes.



Students creating a mediascape



HP Mediascape Editor (schools version)

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From these research activities we developed an over-arching view of what the website should provide. We then developed 'user scenarios' (stories of how a typical user might want to use our website), and used these to create an information architecture and ultimately a paper prototype which we tried out with children and teachers until we were convinced that the website would achieve what we wanted it to.

With educationalists, creative and interactive designers, copywriters, and web developers, along with user testing and reviews, we have developed the website to ensure it is inspiring, accessible and easy-to-follow.

The site will be available from September 2006:

www.createascape.org.uk

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