



Virtual worlds – Users and producers A collaborative journey

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*working with Jeanette Steemers (University of Westminster)
and Rachel Bardill, Peter Davies and colleagues (BBC Children's)*

COMING UP...



'types' of player



principles for a
successful world



reasons why virtual worlds
can be valuable for children

AND:



6 things that adults and
children want from
BBC virtual spaces



5 recommendations
for the BBC



Adventure Rock: a virtual world (or 'game'?)
for children aged around 7 – 11



An island with different zones and levels.
But no social interaction within the world – visitors
play alone (but helped by a ‘friendly robot’).



Free from CBBC website. It’s a downloaded
program, rather than running on the Web.



Creative 'studios' where children can make drawings, animation, comic strip, music, dance, and contraptions



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One of a range of online treats offered by the CBBC website, including *My CBBC*, a social network / bookmarking / self-expression site



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Our working definition...

A **virtual world** is an online space where:

- you can move around
- you can have an impact on the world
- there are benefits from network effects
(other online users add to the experience – it couldn't just run off a CD)



The growth of virtual worlds for children

- | | |
|------|--|
| 1993 | CitySpace (Zane Vella) |
| 1999 | Neopets (Viacom) |
| 2000 | Habbo Hotel (Sulake) |
| 2004 | Ketnet Kick (Larian) |
| 2005 | Virtual Magic Kingdom (Disney) |
| 2005 | WebKinz (Ganz) |
| 2007 | Club Penguin (Disney) |
| 2007 | Nicktropolis (Nickelodeon) |
| 2008 | Moshi Monsters (Mindcandy) |
| 2008 | Adventure Rock (BBC) |
| 2008 | My Tiny Planets (Peppers Ghost) |
| 2010 | Lego Universe (Lego) |



CITYSPACE (1993)



HABBO HOTEL (2000)



MY TINY PLANETS (2008)



What we did: Phase 1

- Research workshops (December 2007–January 2008), with 90 participants aged 7-11 years, in five mixed socio-economic and ethnic groups, in Scotland, Wales, N Ireland, and England.
- The children were encouraged to talk about and illustrate imaginary friends, and spaces, and to suggest what they would like to see in a virtual world.
- The children then had four weeks to explore *Adventure Rock* in their own time, and kept diaries of their experiences and feelings.
- They then took part in a second workshop where they drew and mapped out their key places and things in the world, and made creative suggestions about what they would add, change or remove.
- Parents gave their views, via a questionnaire, about their children's participation in *Adventure Rock*.
- In addition, researcher spent time observing the *Adventure Rock* development team at BBC Children's.



- The children then had four weeks to explore *Adventure Rock* in

What we did



January 2008), with
mixed socio-economic and
London and England



- Parents gave their views, participation in *Adventure*
- In addition, researcher spent time observing the *Adventure Rock* development team at BBC Children's.



EIGHT TYPES OF PLAYER

(or, EIGHT DIFFERENT ORIENTATIONS TO THE ENVIRONMENT)



Explorer-investigators



Self-stampers



Social climbers



Fighters



Collector-consumers



Power users



Life-system builders



Nurturers

Eight types of player...

Explorer-investigators



- **Interested in:** Following a quest, solving a mystery, going on a journey, being 'outdoors'
- **Likely to be:** The more confident children, no age or gender difference
- **Characteristics:** Examines the detail, curious and communicative, imaginative engagement with the mystery

Self-stampers



- **Interested in:** Presenting themselves in the world
- **Likely to be:** Both genders, possibly more older children
- **Characteristics:** Boys and girls wanted to 'make their mark' on their avatar, and perhaps have their own face on there; older girls wanted dress her up and have a make-up studio in *Adventure Rock*. Both boys and girls wanted to express themselves through the creation of a home/base

Eight types of player...

Social climbers



- **Interested in:** Ranking, social position within the environment
- **Likely to be:** Both younger and older children; only some gender bias (boys slightly more than girls)
- **Characteristics:** Competitive; concerned with ranking and exhibiting that ranking to others

Fighters



- **Interested in:** Death and destruction, violence, and superpowers
- **Likely to be:** Male, slight bias towards older boys
- **Characteristics:** In *Adventure Rock*, frustrated that they did not have a means to express themselves, with the exception of beating the crocodiles

Eight types of player...

Collector-consumers



- **Interested in:** Accumulating anything of perceived value within the system
- **Likely to be:** Older boys and girls
- **Characteristics:** Collects pages and coins. Wanted *Adventure Rock* to have shops, enable *gift-giving*, establish an economic system, and have somewhere to put things

Power users



- **Interested in:** Giving everyone the benefit of their knowledge and experience
- **Likely to be:** Expert in the games, the geography of the environment, the systems
- **Characteristics:** Spent more than three hours at a time playing/exploring *Adventure Rock*. An interest in how the game works

Eight types of player...

Life-system builders

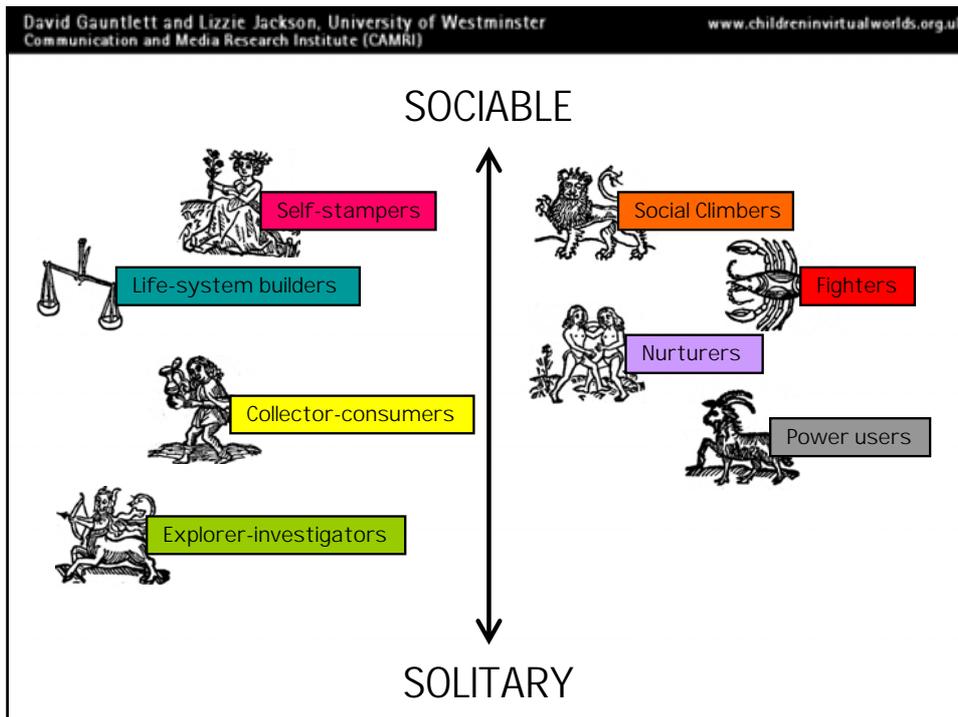


- **Interested in:** Creating new lands, new elements to the environment, populating the environment
- **Likely to be:** Younger children (imagined worlds without any rules), and older children (imagined worlds with rules and systems – houses, schools, shops, transport, economy)
- **Characteristics:** In *Adventure Rock*, frustrated that they did not have a means to express themselves

Nurturers



- **Interested in:** Looking after their avatar, and pets
- **Likely to be:** Younger boys and girls, and older girls
- **Characteristics:** Wanted to meet and play with others. Wanted to teach their avatar to swim, and somewhere for the avatar to sleep. Wanted pets to look after



Thirteen principles for a successful virtual world for children

1. **Sociable** – meeting and chatting
2. **Creative** – making avatar, making things
3. **Control** – owning and changing the space
4. A big, outdoors world to **explore**
5. Visible **status** – how am I doing?
6. Clear **location** – where am I? + easy transport
7. Mission and motivation – what's the **purpose**?
8. Some **humour**
9. **Help** when you need it
10. Chance to see professional **video**, their own work, and other children's
11. Somewhere to live – a **home**, hotel or town
12. **Shops** – buying stuff
13. A space **away** from adult rules (as seen in: everything chocolate!)



The value of virtual worlds for children



1. A playful, engaging, interactive alternative to more passive media
2. Becoming a creator and having control over elements of a world
3. Creating mental maps, exploring, and understanding a new world and its systems (e.g. transport, money)
4. Rehearsing having responsibilities, looking after things
5. Learning social skills
6. Playing with identity, e.g. dressing up
7. A tool for self-expression
8. Computer literacy



What we did: Phase 2

- Workshops with 30 of the same children we worked with in 2008 (aged 7-9 and 10-11 years), from London (January 2009).
- The children were asked whether they continued to use *Adventure Rock* and whether they still visited online worlds for children.
- They were then asked to 'be CBBC producers' for a day, were shown the eight character types (simplified) and asked to design a virtual place or game for one of those characters.
- Workshops with 65 producers and academics took place in London and Manchester (March 2009). Teams were asked to imagine and model an idea for a public service virtual space or place.
- A designer from BBC Children's 'articulated' three of the ideas, working from the workshop participant's descriptions.
- The ideas will be shown to the BBC's 'rapid prototyping' team in BBC Future Media and Technology to see if they wish to take the ideas further.
A workshop will be organised with CBBCi producers on the children's orientations to the types and to *Adventure Rock*, one year later.

The London workshop

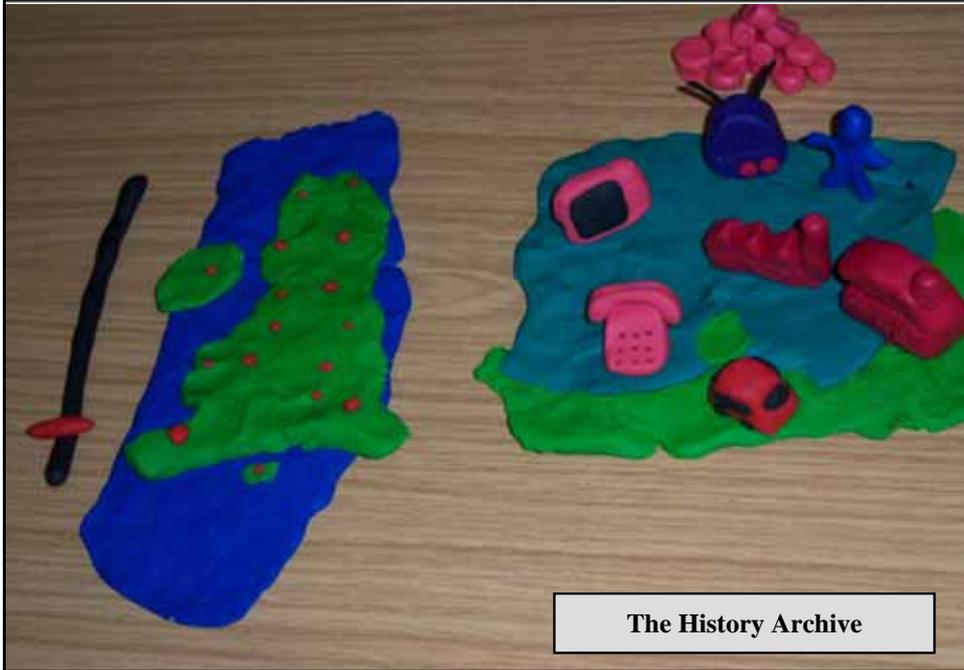




The Olympic Aquatic Centre



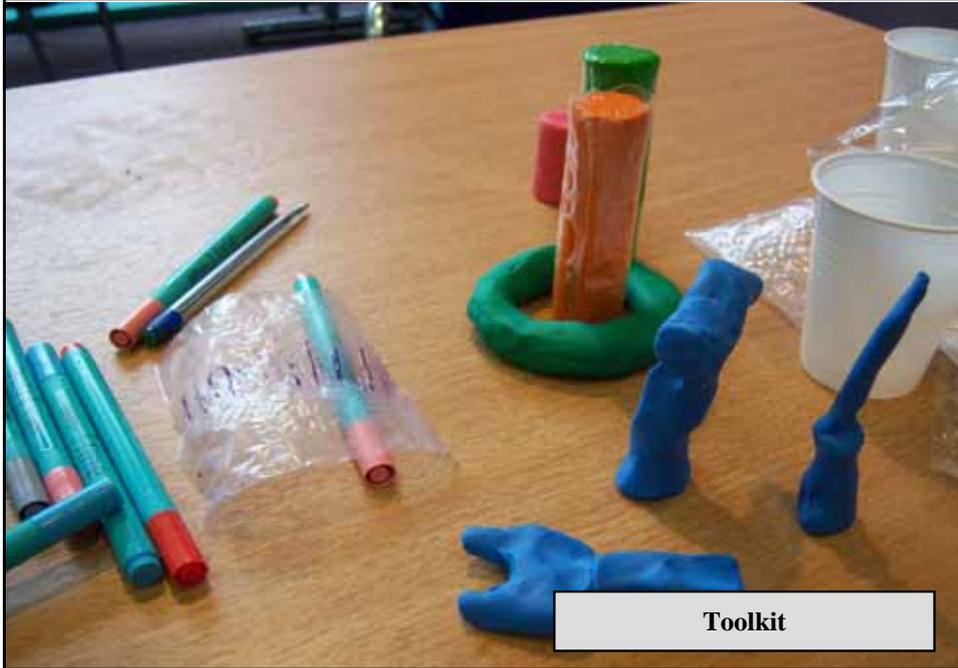
Virtual EastEnders



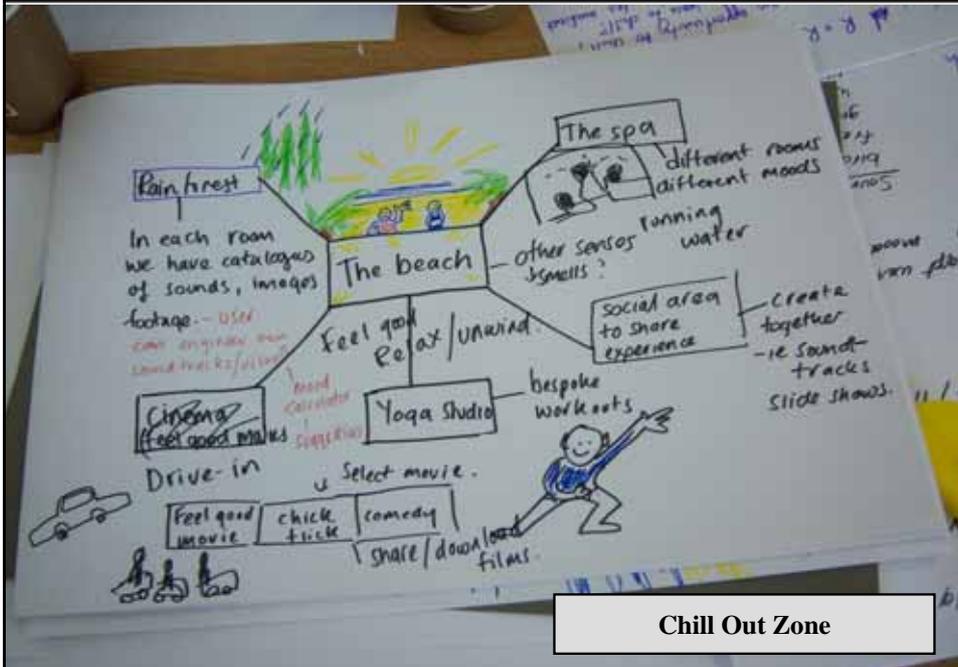
The History Archive



Open Navigation



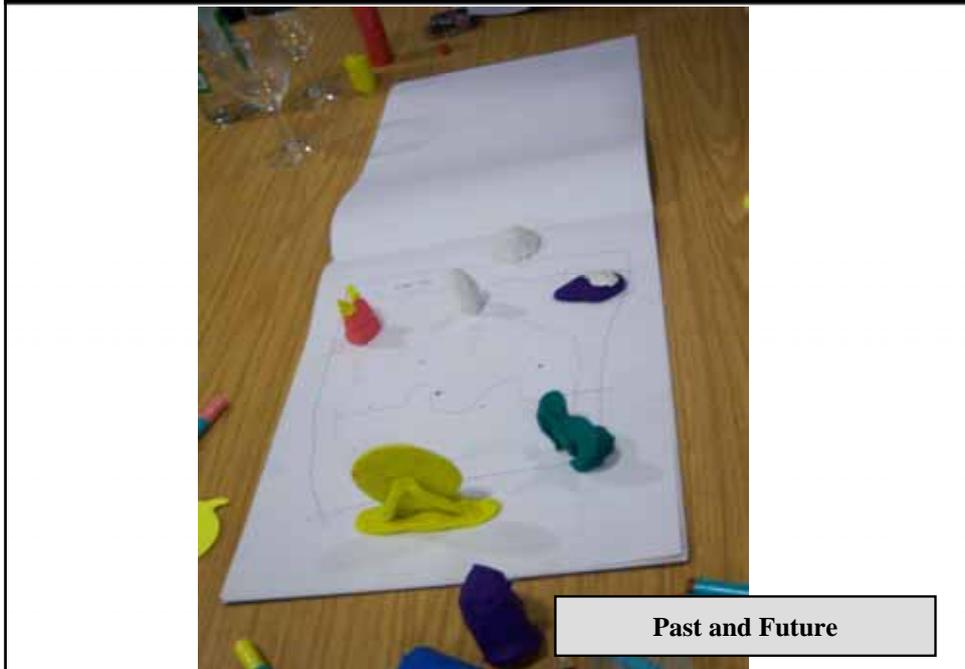
Toolkit



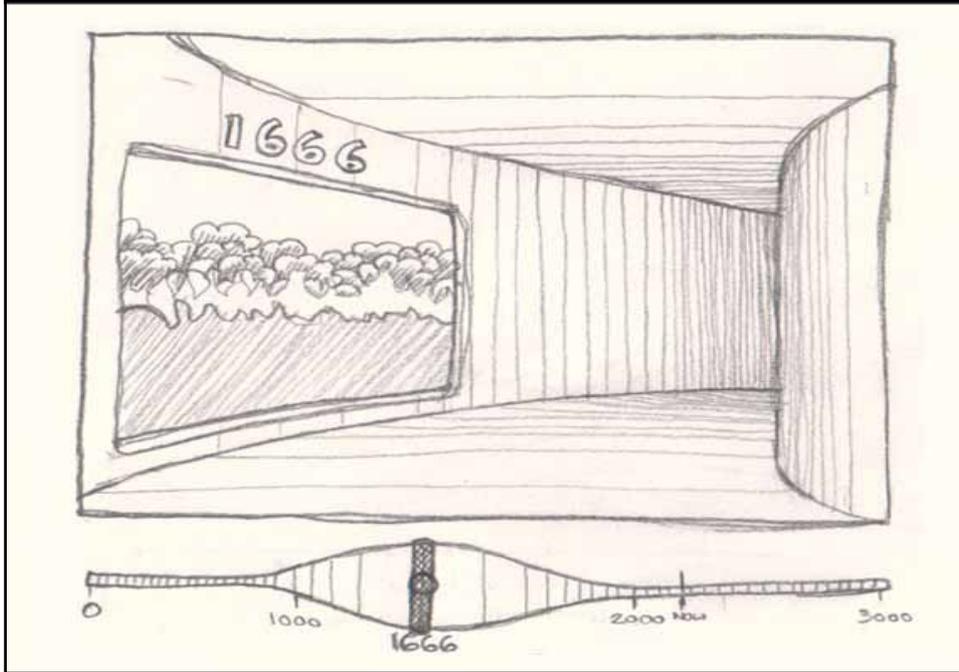
Chill Out Zone



Right to Reply Hub

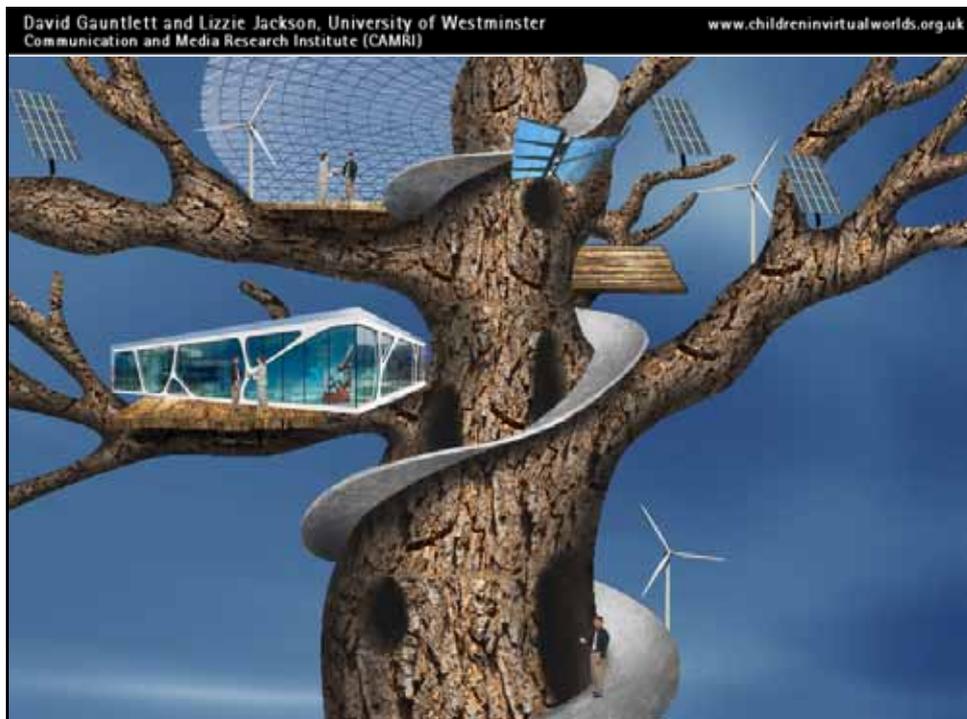


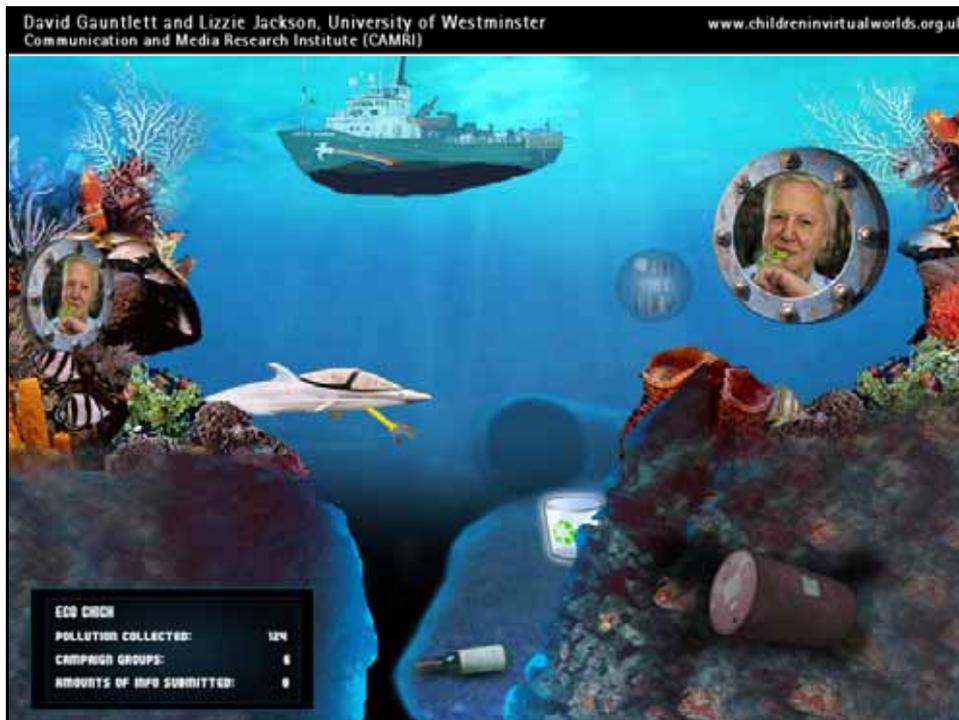
Past and Future











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What people want from BBC virtual spaces

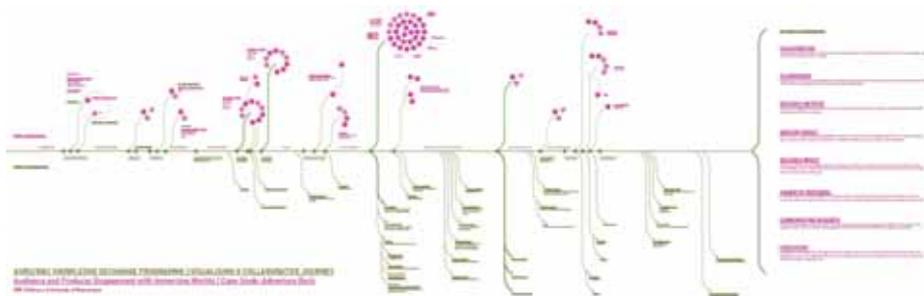
	1. Spaces which pull together diverse content (e.g. <i>Open Navigation, Past and Future, History Archive</i>)
	2. Places of activism, learning & making a difference (<i>Eco-learn, Past and Future, Bringing up Baby</i>)
	3. A new relationship between 'audience' and 'producers' (<i>Right to Reply Hub, and the others</i>)
	4. DIY media (<i>Toolkit, Collaborative Immersive Newsroom Hub</i>) – modern public service media should be giving people tools, developed collaboratively, to make their own material
	5. A richer experience of BBC content or brands (<i>The Olympic Aquatic Centre, Virtual EastEnders</i>)
	6. Entertainment (<i>Chill-out Zone, Survival</i>)

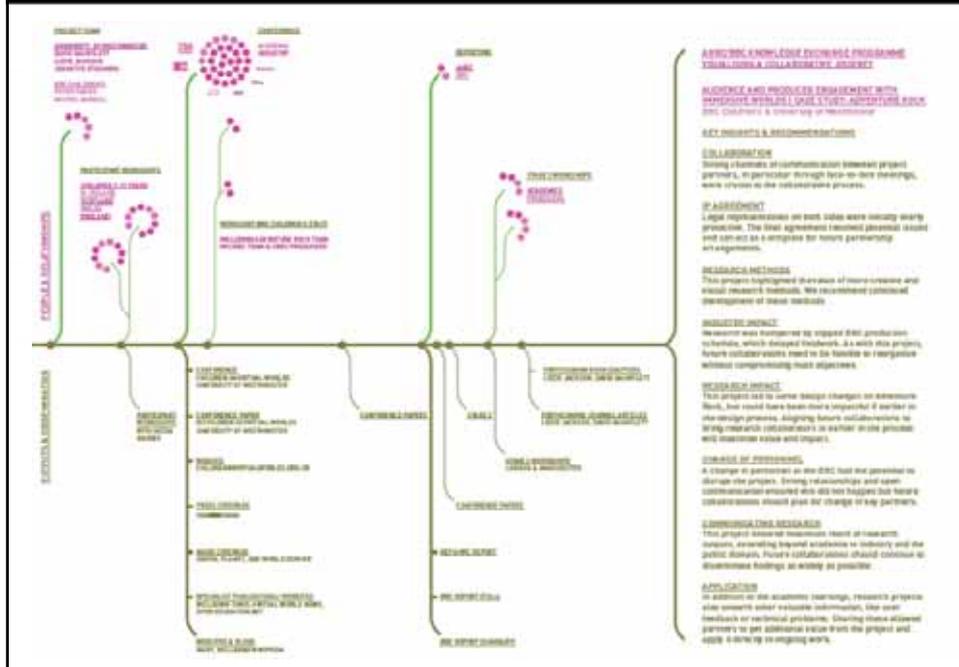
... Leading to these recommendations:



1. People want to negotiate a new relationship with their BBC; the BBC should enable and facilitate this.
2. The BBC should collaborate with audiences/users from the very start of idea development through to final products ... to avoid alienating audiences ... to avoid expensive mistakes ... and to properly fulfil the public-service remit.
3. Participatory behaviour needs to be studied and understood over *time*; when it's not one-hit broadcasting you need to see how relationships with and within social media change and develop.
4. The BBC should facilitate audiences/users in their desire to collaborate, make connections, create and remix media.
5. 'Public service' today does not (just) mean producing things for the public to consume, but giving people the tools to engage creatively themselves – to help them move from audiences/consumers to enthusiasts/activists in whatever fields they choose.

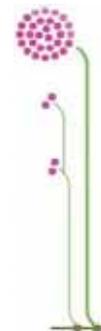
Visualising the collaborative journey





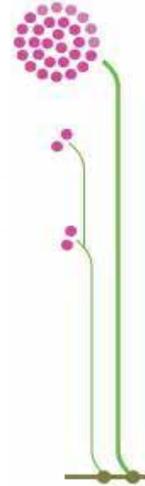
Reflections on the collaboration

- Colleagues in BBC Children's all very helpful, professional, and great
- BBC PR/management pre-launch announcements created confusion about what we were actually going to be studying (!) – not a social environment, not very Web 2.0
- Due to limited flexibility of research timescales, in Phase One we lost potential opportunities to study the creative and social elements
- Nevertheless, the study enabled us to see children's and adults' creative ideas, and their potential for involvement in development of services



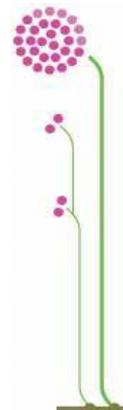
Reflections on the collaboration

- BBC people may tend to think audience research = user testing
- Ideally, a research collaboration should begin much earlier, from point of *conception*, to have input throughout ... not just 'beta testing'
- In Adventure Rock study, would probably have been better to look at *all* of the CBBC online social media offering, not just this one element
- But we are all **LEARNING** from this, together – good!



Benefits of collaboration between media industries and academics

- Thinking-through fundamental issues and potential new initiatives, and new relationships with audiences/users
- ...with academics – who may have a broader or longer-term view, and understandings of users and social impact ...
- ... brings benefits such as:
 - building on existing knowledge
 - more effective audience impact
 - avoid expensive mistakes
 - external evaluation



MAKING IS CONNECTING

In **MAKING IS CONNECTING**, David Gauntlett argues that through making things, online or offline, we make connections with others and increase our engagement with the world. From crafts and knitting to YouTube and Web 2.0, we use how creativity can be harnessed to tackle social problems and global issues. The book will come out in 2010, for now, here's a website.

VIDEO is connecting
Some of the things in connecting often take place in the real world. This is a 30-minute video of the book.

WRITING is connecting
Writing from Making is connecting will appear first in the book in winter 2009. This is the first and only book to be published in the UK.

LINKING is connecting
When you share and connect ideas to the web, it makes a difference.

BLOGGING is connecting
Blogging is an online writing space of people making something, often connecting with people who do the same thing. This is a book about blogging.

David Gauntlett
Come with us to see what the world is like.

One of the oldest social media mailing lists!

There will be other words, the words that a man did have been getting since 2000 about how to do it. The words themselves are all together at once, an online community conference in one place. They take into the old online community members there and still have the old, a highly-organised group of all get together a month later in the UK. It's not a group of 100,000 people, it's a group of the selected few of the old community members who all have to work on and have a really good time.

David Gauntlett is a writer and has given, had meetings and other conferences. He has a book, *Making is Connecting*. During the past meeting that he has had a book meeting now in place with the book meeting. He has a book, *Making is Connecting*, which will be published in the UK in 2010.

The idea is to have a book meeting, and then support that the book meeting that all have done. The idea is to have a book meeting and then have a book meeting and support. The book meeting is a book meeting and then have a book meeting and then have a book meeting. The book meeting is a book meeting and then have a book meeting and then have a book meeting.

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