



## Virtual worlds – Users and producers Case study: *Adventure Rock*

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*working with Jeanette Steemers (University of Westminster)*

*and Peter Davies, Rachel Bardill and colleagues (BBC Children's)*

COMING UP...



'types' of player



principles for a  
successful world



reasons why virtual worlds  
can be valuable for children



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

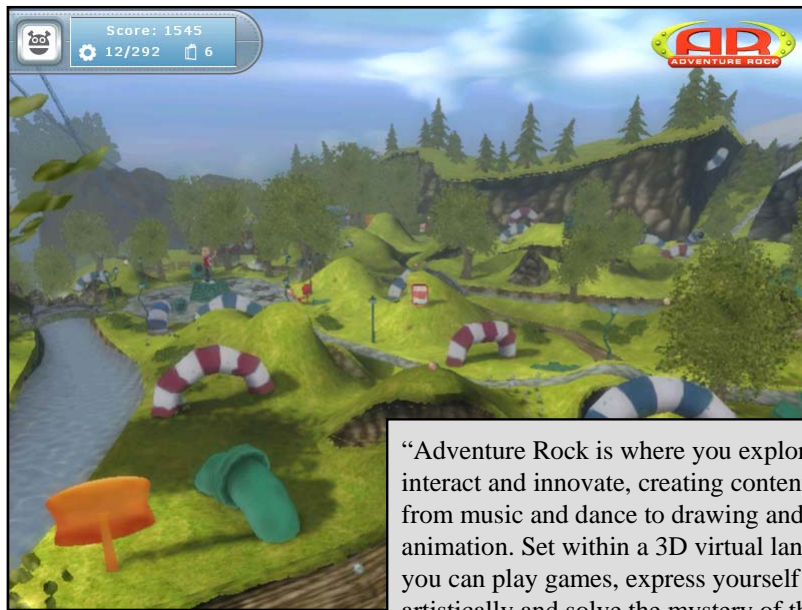


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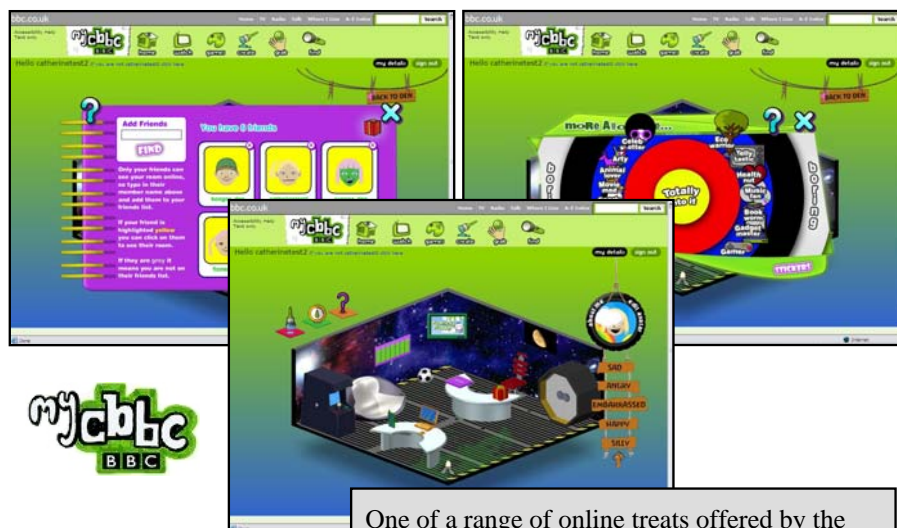
“Adventure Rock is where you explore, create, interact and innovate, creating content ranging from music and dance to drawing and animation. Set within a 3D virtual landscape, you can play games, express yourself artistically and solve the mystery of the island.”



Screens within the world where children can watch daily *Adventure Rock* news, CBBC content, and selected work by other children from the studios

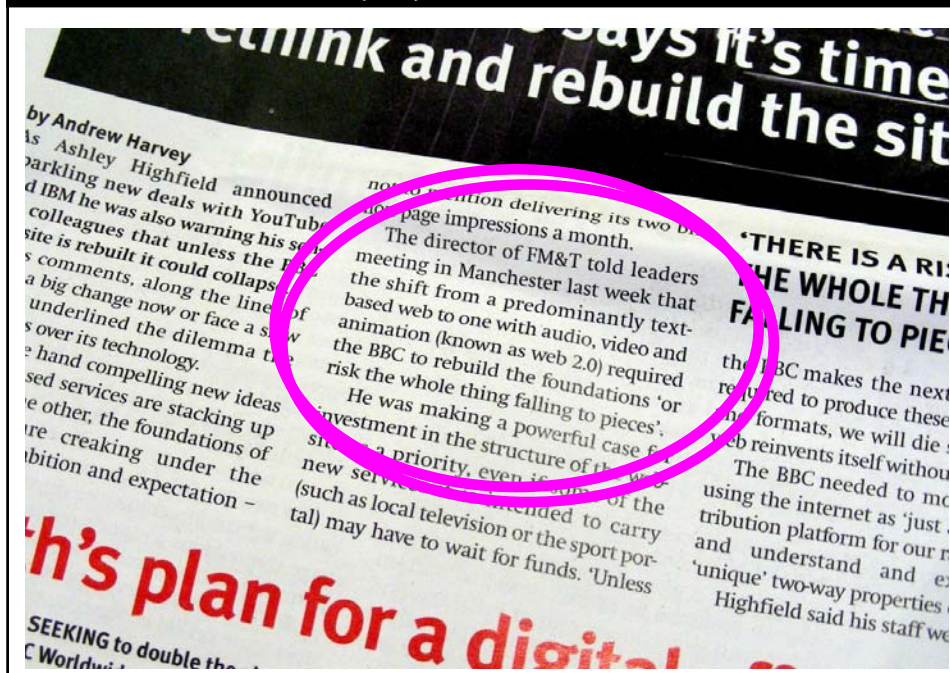


One of a range of online treats offered by the CBBC website, including *My CBBC*, a social network / bookmarking / self-expression site

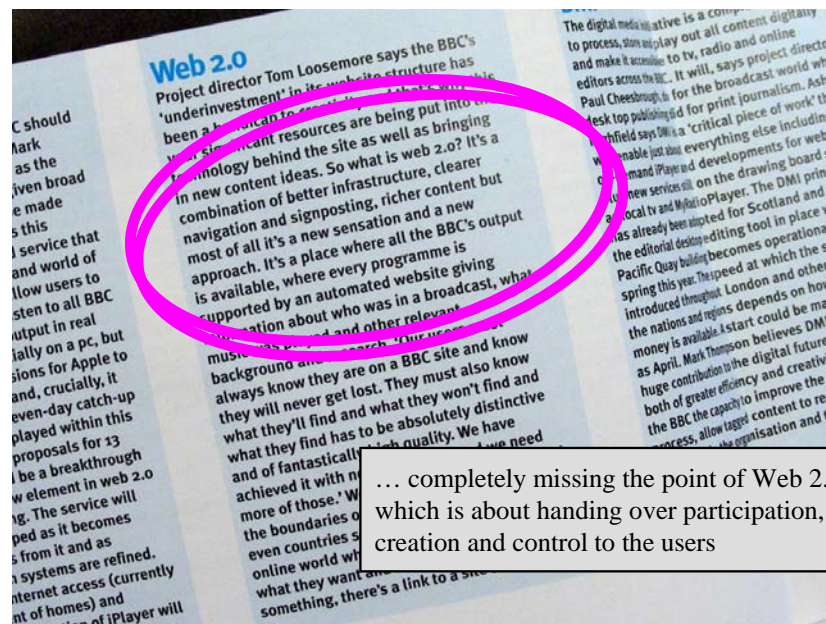


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Back in March 2007...







## Our working definition...

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

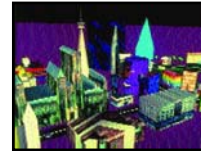
- you can move around
- you can have an impact on the world
- there are benefits from network effects  
(other online users add to the experience – it couldn't just run off a CD)





## The growth of virtual worlds for children

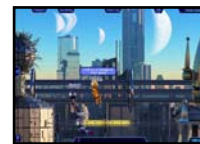
1993	<b>CitySpace</b> (Zane Vella)
1999	<b>Neopets</b> (Viacom)
2000	<b>Habbo Hotel</b> (Sulake)
2004	<b>Ketnet Kick</b> (Larian)
2005	<b>Virtual Magic Kingdom</b> (Disney)
2005	<b>WebKinz</b> (Ganz)
2007	<b>Club Penguin</b> (Disney)
2007	<b>Nicktropolis</b> (Nickelodeon)
2008	<b>Moshi Monsters</b> (Mindcandy)
2008	<b>Adventure Rock</b> (BBC)
2008	<b>My Tiny Planets</b> (Peppers Ghost)
2009	<b>Lego Universe</b> (Lego)



CITYSPACE (1993)



HABBO HOTEL (2000)



MY TINY PLANETS (2008)

“The years from three to six are generally recognised as the golden years of pretend, or make-believe, play”

Imagining worlds is something we do naturally; it may be this is the adult manifestation of what we did as a child

“As children develop, they make greater and greater efforts to adapt to reality, rather than distorting reality, as in make-believe play”

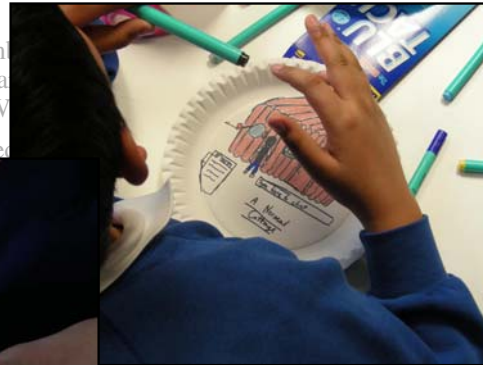
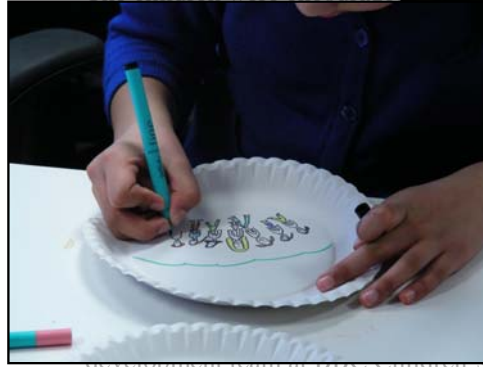


## What we did

- 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.

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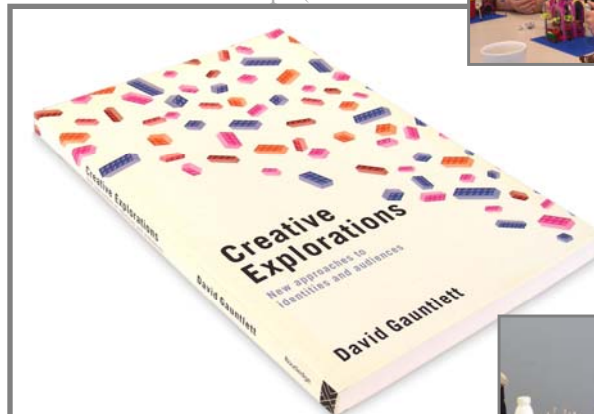
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development team at BBC Children's





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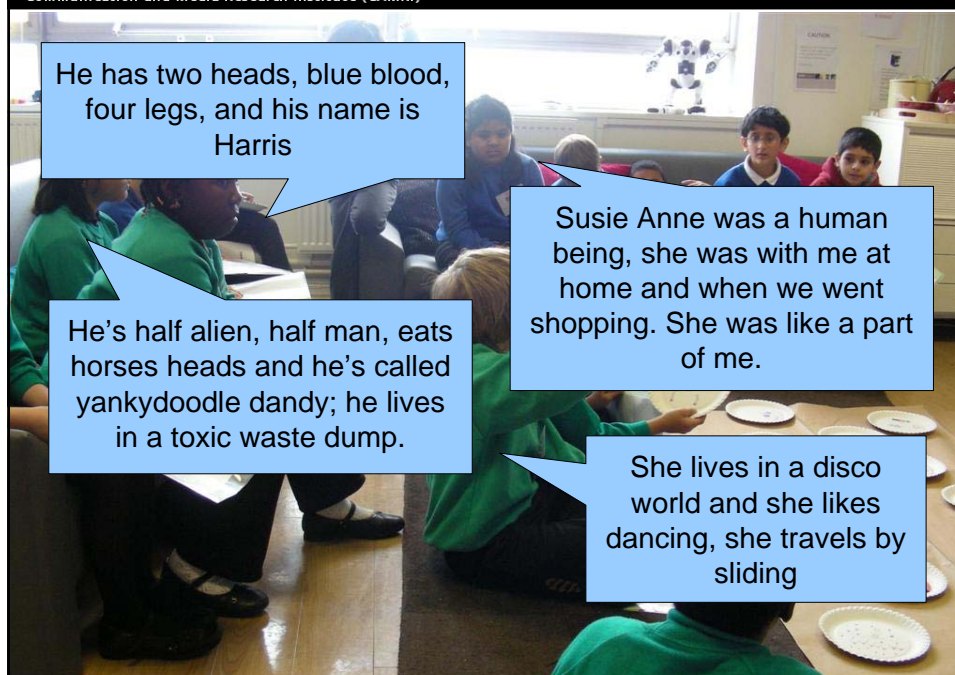
## What we did



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



- creative suggestions about
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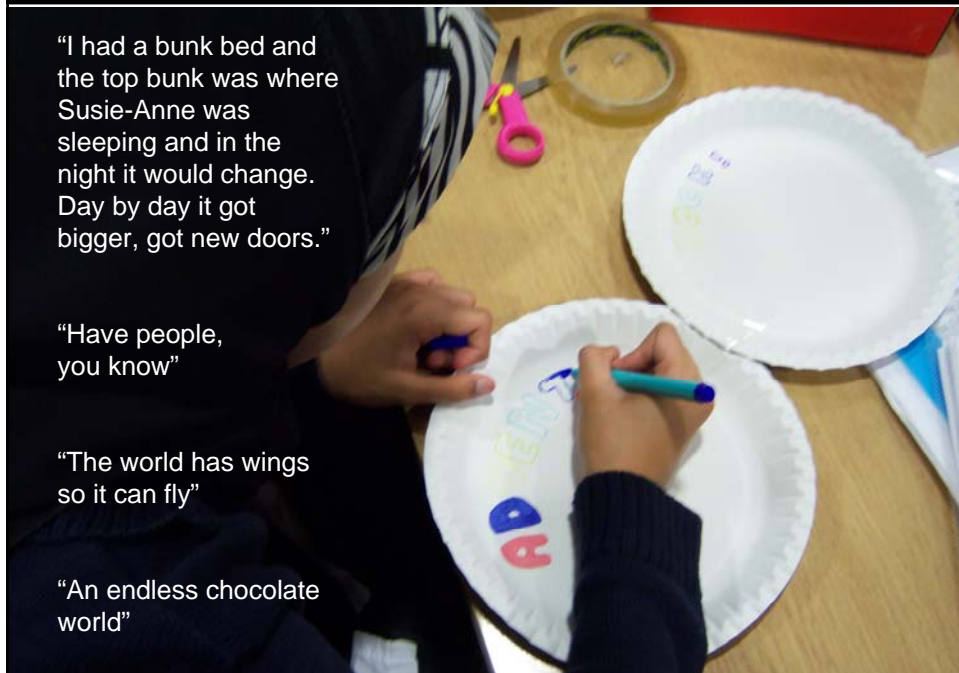


"I had a bunk bed and  
the top bunk was where  
Susie-Anne was  
sleeping and in the  
night it would change.  
Day by day it got  
bigger, got new doors."

"Have people,  
you know"

"The world has wings  
so it can fly"

"An endless chocolate  
world"



## 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

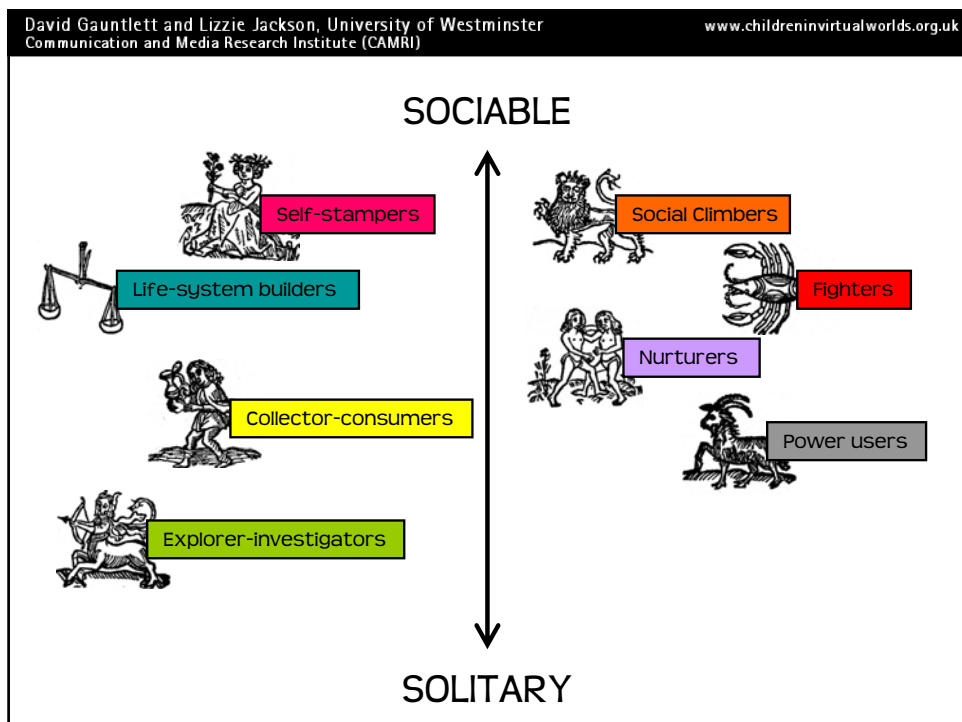


- **Interested in:** Creating new lands, new elements to the environment, populating the environment
- **Likely to be:** Younger children (imagined worlds without any rules), and older children (imagined worlds with rules and systems – houses, schools, shops, transport, economy)
- **Characteristics:**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

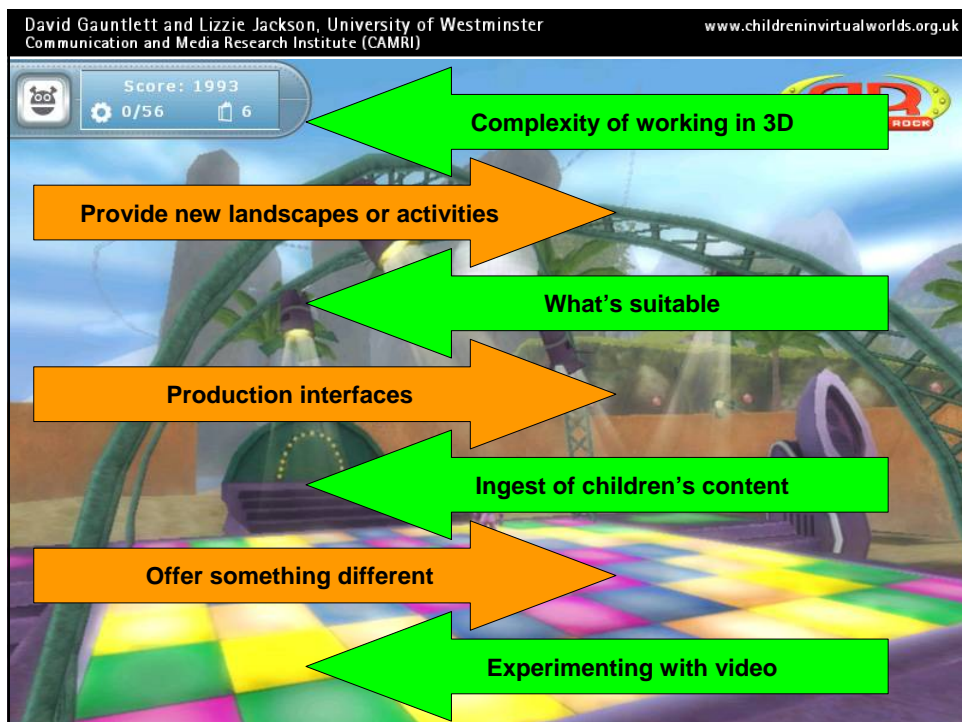
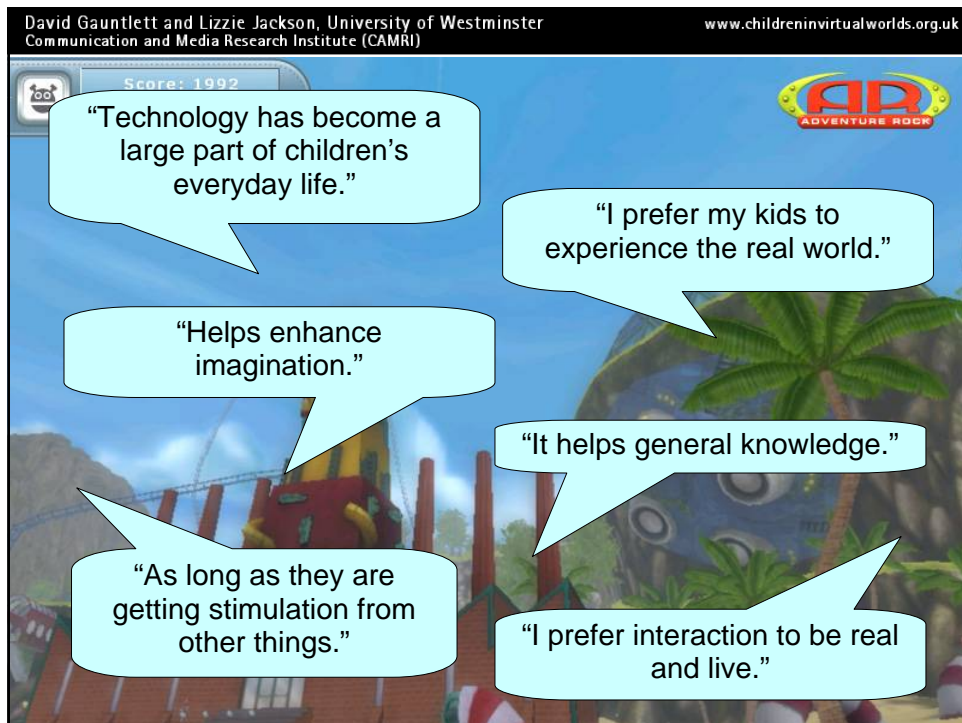
Nurturers



- **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

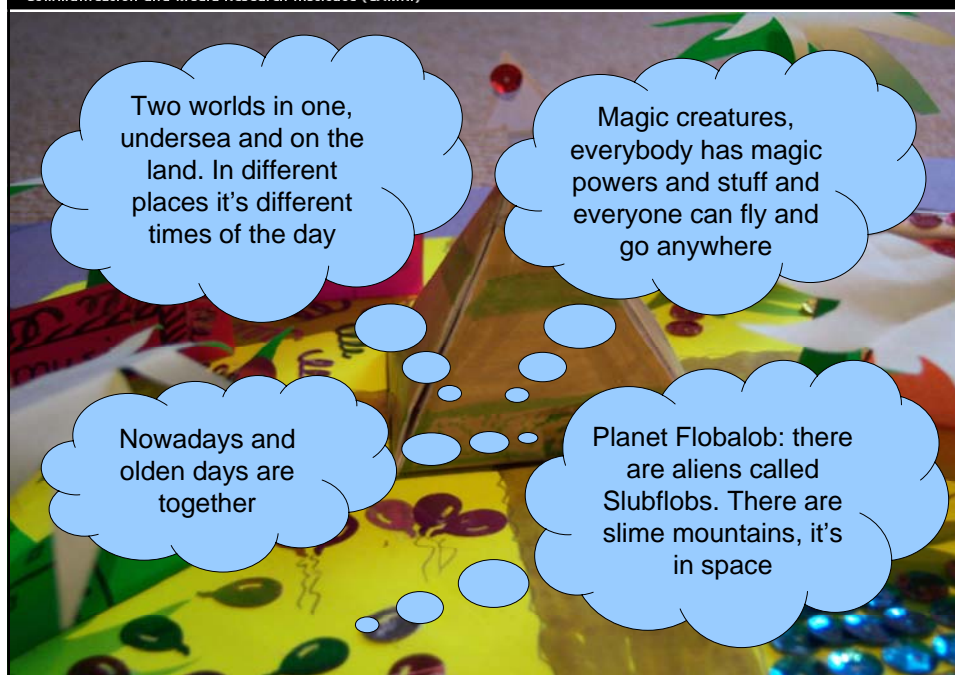






## Thirteen principles for a successful virtual world for children

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

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