TECHNOLOGY

KidPad: A Collaborative Storytelling Environment for Children

OVERVIEW

KidPad is an end-user application for children to create stories by working together. KidPad allows the children to see an overview of the entire story they created by leaving an individual "page" and zooming out to view all pages at once. Individual areas can be zoomed in on, and more detail can be added. A typical use is to draw something inside a character's head to show what they are thinking. The children create spatial hyperlinks between areas on the surface to link parts of the story. Following a hyperlink allows the viewpoint to be smoothly animated to the destination of that hyperlink.

KidPad supports simultaneous use by multiple children by plugging in numerous mice into a single computer. The children can then collaboratively create the story together; while one child is drawing, another may be typing, and a third could be creating hyperlinks. The support for multiple mice comes from a separate software package wherein its code is freely available on the web. The KidPad interface is unique in that it completely avoids pull down menus and tool palettes by using "local tools". These are pictures of items that sit on the data surface and can be used at any time by simply clicking on them with the mouse. In particular this latter feature works well with young children or with those that may be learning disabled.

In general, this software lends itself well as an interdisciplinary instructional tool to a variety of school language art programs wherein the children not only can learn the rudiments of story construction but at the same time glean computer skills together with interactive team collaboration.

For information please contact the University of Maryland, Office of Technology Commercialization (301)- 405-3947, e-mail otc@umd.edu.

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