Mediascapes for Mobile Learning

Mscape is a free, accessible tool for building location-aware applications on Windows Mobile based devices, such as PDAs (Personal Digital Assistants) and Smartphones. It has a simple 'drag and drop' development environment, meaning people with little or no programming experience can easily create their own 'mediascapes' from scratch.

In its simplest form, a 'mediascape' identifies a user's location in the world using GPS (Global Positioning System) and uses this to deliver information in the field. Media such as images, sounds, videos and web pages are triggered when the user enters 'hotspots' in the landscape, the details of which are customised by the creator of the mediascape. To find out more, download the software and peruse an online library of existing mediascapes, visit http://www.mscapers.com or http://www.createascape.org.uk/ .

Mediascapes can be put to a number of uses within a teaching environment, and the technology can be applied to an endless number of subject areas. The examples below demonstrate some experiences of using mediascapes in teaching at varying stages in education, from Key Stage 2 through to Undergraduate and Masters level.

Historical Buildings Trail

What? A simple interactive guide, delivering information about historic buildings while standing near them.

Why? Undertaken on a field trip, as part of a project to learn about the local village.

Well..? The children engaged with the technology. They found it exciting and 'cool', and were keen to find the next piece of information by discovering hotspots. They commented that they found it more enjoyable than if their teacher had just told them about the buildings, or handed them information on photocopied sheets.
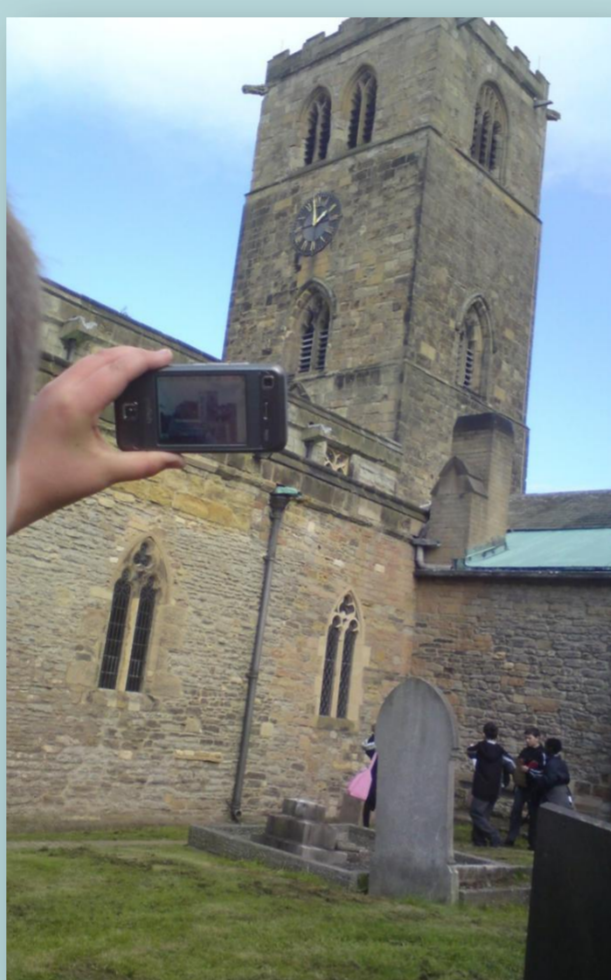
Map Skills Treasure Hunt

What? A sequential treasure hunt game, awarding 'tokens' for successfully finding the next location along the trail. Onscreen clues are used in conjunction with a laminated map and aerial photo.

Why? Undertaken as an exercise to improve skills in map reading, distance estimation, observation, 2D-3D relations and following directions.

Well..? The children enjoyed the sense of competition with their peers and found it motivated them to work quickly and efficiently. They embraced the independence gained from making their own decisions and mistakes.
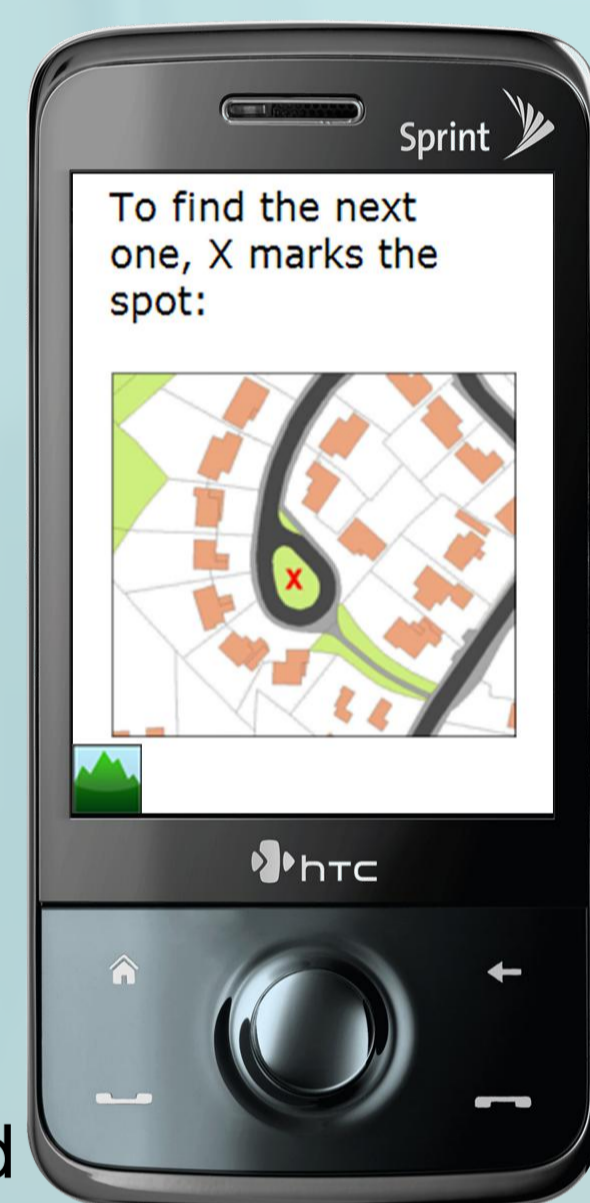
This is Our School

What? A guide to the school grounds and surrounding area, created by the pupils themselves.

Why? Undertaken as part of a project looking at ways of providing information to visitors at a certain location.

Well..? The children liked being able to personalise their media, and had fun creating the different formats – video especially. They were able to pick elements of the school important to them, telling their own stories through unique opinions and ideas. The teacher found the authoring software intuitive and simple to use, and the digital format allowed easy editing and updating.

Interactive Tourist Guide

What? A series of mediascapes delivering relevant information about the landscape and surrounding area in part of the Lake District National Park

Why? Undertaken as part of a 3rd Year Undergraduate/Masters project investigating different ways to 'Augment the Visitor Experience'.

Well..? The students found the software easy to understand and simple to use. They thought the customisable aspect would give it practical uses in the real world, with scope for sharing mediascapes between users, and that the ability to offer interactive media would enrich the tourist experience.

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