"Kidspiration" Software Review[1]

Reviewed by Petrea Redmond, USQ

Hardware Requirements:
Windows: 486 processor or higher; Windows 95, 98 NT 4.0, 2000, or ME; 640 x 480 256 colour display or higher; 8MB RAM; 5 MB available hard drive minimum, 20 MB available for full installation; CD-ROM drive.

Macintosh: Macintosh or Power Macintosh, System 7.1, 8.0, 9.0 or higher; 640 x 480 display, 256 colours or better; 2 MB RAM; 5 MB available hard drive minimum, 30 MB available for full installation, CD-ROM drive.

Reviewed on: Pentium III/667, 127 MB RAM, Windows 98, SuperVGA monitor, 1.5GB hard drive, CDRW drive.

Recommended Age: 4 – 9 years, P – Year 5

Support Materials
There is a range of support material available to assist teachers who are not confident in the use of technology as they start their journey with "Kidspiration": Kidspiration User's Guide; Exploring Kidspiration Interactive Training CD; Kidspiration Activity Book; Kidspiration for Terrified Teachers K – 3.

Educational Focus: Building thinking skills thorough visual learning, cross curricula applications.

Single Licence approximate costs and distributors:
EQ schools: Access Ed, $40 (currently under renegotiation)
Catholic schools: Edsoft, $40
Other New Horizons, $160
Single, Site and Upgrade licences available.

Publisher: Inspiration Software, Inc.

Introduction

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[1] This review appeared in *Quick*,85, 21-24, TEC Toowoomba, 2005

Being a fan of "Inspiration" the visual thinking tool for creative thinking, concept mapping and webbing, I thought I would try Kidspiration for Pre-school to Year 5 (P – 5). Kidspiration is designed on Inspiration's visual learning tools which can help students clarify thinking, reinforce understanding, and integrate new knowledge by connecting pictures, words and ideas.

This software enables emerging readers and writers to brainstorm, categorize and create stories without their limited reading and writing skills being a barrier. It is great for students to create thought webs or mapping ideas and helps children build links with information.

Overview
The start screen is useful for non-readers; it has simple icons and audio support. Unfortunately the audio support is with an American accent. Through the program, the audio support is easy to access, children just need to point the mouse to text and it will read it.

The software has three main areas: picture view and writing view for student to create their own maps and a number of built in activities.

Picture View

In the picture view children are able to organise and express their ideas using images and/or words. The first idea is their starting point, children type to add text (words or phrase) and click on the add symbol tool to add new ideas showing how they relate. Students will need to remember to click in the new area prior to writing. There is a symbol pallet with 1200 images sorted into libraries for ease of use and teachers can add images. Children can use these images to present their own ideas rather than text or in addition to text. The Listening tool will read the children's writing or enable children to record their own words.

Writing view
This view enables students to connect words to their images or to include additional text to their ideas. It can assist students to plan or organise their writing.

The picture and writing views are integrated so children can switch between the two. This view shows children the connection between the visual thoughts and their written expressions. In both views the toolbar and tools are simple to use and easy to modify. Children can customize their web by changing background colours, font and size.

Activities
The program has 45 built-in activities where text and images can be dragged and dropped into position. These activities have a literacy, science or social science focus. They include patterns, categories, sorting, comparing, and grammar activities and the list goes on. With the teacher control you are able to customize the built in classroom activities or create your own activities using the Activity wizard.

Navigation is simple and uses the Kidspiration Logo as the means to return to the start screen from all areas within the software.

Printing and Saving

Students are able to print and save their webs or the completed activities. Prior to printing there is a template for children to complete with their name, class etc to ensure they can identify their own work. Diagrams that students create can be exported into other programs such as MSWord and FrontPage.

More information on Kidspiration and Inspiration can be found at http://www.inspiration.com/. From this site you can preview sample lesson plans, using the software, access a demonstration, or download a full working version trial for 30 days. There is also an online newsletter and

work samples and teacher ideas on the website. You can also access free demonstration CDs from the Toowoomba Technology Mathematics and Science Centre of Excellence (TTMSCE, phone 07 4639 0423) or your local Technology LDC's if they are an Inspiration Preview Centre.

Recommendation

I believe this program lives up to its claim that "Kidspiration helps children develop confidence as they learn or organise information, understand concepts and connections, create stories and express and share their thoughts".

The integration of the picture view, writing view and audio makes this software perfect for emerging readers and writers and it is well designed for children from P - year 5. The software is easy to use and apply in the classroom across any KLA. It is a great program to enable children of all ability levels to see, organise and develop ideas though open-ended and curriculum specific activities.

I tried it with my own children aged five and eight and they found it was very user friendly and fun to use.

It is easy to install on stand-alone machines and is able to be installed on networks. The web site provides online technical support by way of FAQ's and email technical assistance.
The overall presentation and navigation within software packing is exceptional. It has low system requirements which means that most computers in schools would be able to run the program and is great value under both the Education Queensland and Catholic schools agreements.

I would highly recommend it for early childhood classrooms and some special needs students in higher year levels. Children will use this program with ease, both individually and in groups to build thinking skills and link writing ideas.