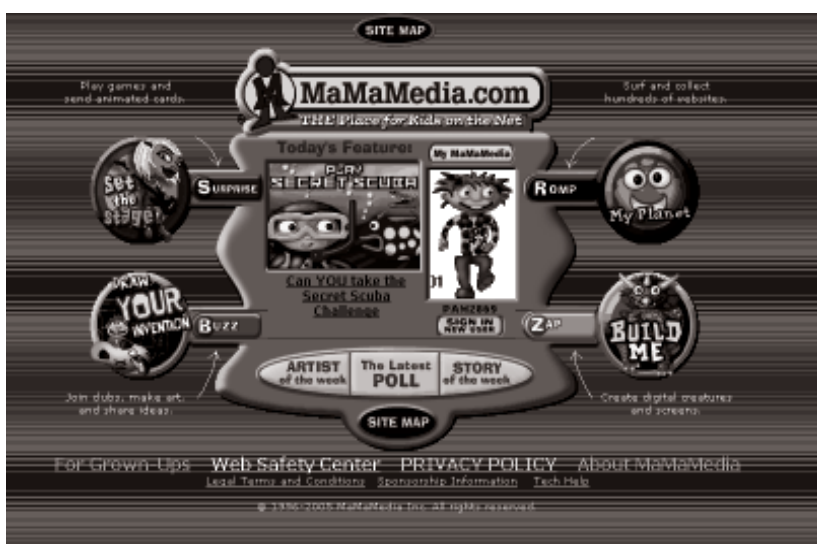


## Kids Explore, Express and Exchange on the Internet

Pam Berger, Editor

Interactivity is the name of the game at MaMaMedia.com, a website dedicated to kids, ages 5-12. The opening page is vibrant with lime-green icons with small captions explaining what they contain: Surprise, play games and create animated cards; Zap, create digital creatures and screens; Buzz, join clubs make art and share ideas; and Romp surf and collect hundreds of websites. Each icon highlights the activity of the week and I couldn't resist "ZAP, Build Me" where I quickly personalized the digital creature on my opening page with combinations of moving body parts. I choose a colorful background wallpaper and personalized the icons with cool shapes and then moved on to more fun with the Today's Feature: The Secret Scuba Challenge. By using the up and down arrow keys I was able to navigate through perilous deep seas among huge striped fish, hungry alligators, fast moving submarines and a coral reef. As my strategy improved so did my chances for survival.

Sounds ordinary? It's not. MaMaMedia has over 100 repayable original activities geared to what the site calls the three X's that the clickerati—kids who are comfortable with technology,



<http://www.mamamedia.com>

expect interactivity, and thrive on challenge—will need to master in the age of new media: eXplore, eXpress and eXchange.

The site, which has over 5 million registered members, offers digital tools kids can use to create their own stories, plays, artwork, inventions and characters. Launched in 1996 as an MIT Media Lab spin-off by Dr. Idit Harel, it's based on the principles of constructivism which holds that children learn best when they're actively engaged in building—or constructing—something they care about. In addition, the theory contends that kids are motivated by sharing their creations with others.

The grownups area contains over 20 articles on education including Transforming Collaborative Teaching Using the Internet: What will it be like in 2010? Safety, Privacy, and COPPA: What It Means to You, Kids Imagine the Technology of the Future. The teacher section includes lesson plans and an opportunity to share your lesson plans.

In the parent section, "Webtivities" are thoughtful activities parents can do with their kids, like the "Egypt

*Continued on page 2*

## Looking Back, Moving Forward

WOW! Another year has gone by, our sixteenth publishing the Information Searcher newsletter. As the saying goes, time flies by when you are having fun. And that's what it all about — or should be— enjoying what you do and feeling proud of it. So at year's end I'd like to reflect on what we have accomplished in 2004.

Feature articles and columns on teaching information literacy skills, award winning science websites, the future of technology, copyright issues, and blogging along with emphasis on 24/7 reference, current events, online museums, inspiring kids to read — to mention just a few — focus on the practical application and integration of technology into the curriculum.

And, we have lots more in store for Information Searcher. We're working on redesigning our website to include a blog so you can have updates on relevant issues, new websites, and join in the conversation to effectively integrate technology into the teaching and learning process.

This would not be possible without the wonderful team of columnists we have. I am constantly in awe of the great work they do and the contribution they make to this newsletter. We are proud of the Information Searcher and the positive response we have received from many of you. We hope it will continue for many years to come. Have a happy New Year!

### Main Menu

#### Features

**Kids Explore...** p.1  
**AUPs** p. 13

#### Columns

**Processing Notes** p. 2  
**Cyber Sites** p. 4  
**The Stacks** p. 17  
**The Pipeline..** p. 20  
**Cyber Tools** p. 29

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### *Kids Explore, Express...continued from page 1*

The activities can be accessed by clicking on one of the four colorful icons, which can be personalized from a choice of different designs as seen below:



Zap activities cultivate reading and writing skills, as well as self-expression, technical fluency and communication skills



Romp activities are aimed at developing classification, word meaning and association skills, as well as logic skills.



Surprise! activities develop imagination, creative thinking, logic, writing and scenario-building skills.



In Buzz, kids will learn communication skills, such as how to share knowledge, present ideas and learn from others.

As educators, the easiest way to understand MaMaMedia's underlying teaching and learning philosophy is to look at what they call the three X's: eXplore, eXpress and eXchange.

"The first X, eXploring, takes advantage of kids' natural passion for learning and discovery. We all know that you have to give children an open, safe place in which to explore, whether that's a playroom filled with building blocks, or butcher paper spread on a kitchen wall for coloring. In this open space, it's not so much what your child makes as it is that she is in the driver's seat of her own learning experience. That's when the learning resonates — when a child discovers for herself rather than being told. The Net can be the ideal learning environment for such open-ended discovery, the kind that creates a passion and desire for learning itself. And children who are confident explorers develop resourceful and flexible minds."

*To begin exploring go to Romp and choose any of the Party activities to explore words in a unique and clever way.*

"Second is eXpressing, or learning how to use a vast palette of tools to become designers, builders and architects of your own ideas. The Net expands the notion of a tool into infinite dimensions with its veritable warehouse of creative instruments that includes sounds, color, motion. From building a digital skyscraper to designing an animated webpage, the Net lets children create, work and play in ways they never could before. For kids, mastering the art of self-expression is not about attending high-tech art class; it's about using digital media to become versatile and effective communicators of ideas."



*To begin expressing go straight to What's the Story in Surprise and have fun writing the script to your animated scene.*

"The third X, eXchanging, is the sharing of ideas with others. It is my belief that real learning only occurs in a social context, in an environment where you can exchange ideas, ask questions and work with peers and experts. Moreover, through eXchanging, kids become active participants in their learning, not passive absorbers of information. Kids also learn about teamwork and the benefits of collaboration when they

share ideas, thoughts and creations. Knowing how to share ideas creatively and collaboratively enhances and integrates a child's learning and opens up new learning opportunities through interactive exchange."

*To begin expressing go to Buzz and join a club or vote in a poll.*

"The three Xs will help children become masters of change in a world in which change is all that is certain. We must give our kids the tools they need to develop and learn these skills so they can grow and succeed."