Maltese Fonts and *Kid Pix*

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Year 1 and 2 teachers supplied with the older version of *Kid Pix Studio* are well aware of a number of restrictions in the program one of which is that the use of Maltese Fonts is practically impossible, whether these are installed on the hard disk or not. The problem is that *Kid Pix Studio* has its own, very limited, number of *graphical* fonts which, once pasted onto the screen, become part and parcel of the picture. Apart from this small number of fonts, there is no way for *Kid Pix Studio* to access and recognise the normal TrueType Fonts installed in *Windows*, and available for practically all the Windows-based applications such as *Word* and *Print Shop Ensemble III*.

> ❝ **Whenever you need to use Maltese text for a *Kid Pix* on-screen activity, you can simply create a graphics-only bitmap in *Kid Pix*** ❞

I have observed that most teachers have gone around this problem by actually adding hashes and dots to the Maltese letters, using the Pencil or Straight Line tools. Although this may be a practical makeshift solution, the results are not always accurate and visually pleasing. When considering that we are here speaking about activities for children who are still becoming acquainted to letters, the results may tend to be misleading at times and perhaps even counter productive.

There is in fact a better solution to the problem once you understand the inner workings of both *Kid Pix* and the *Windows* operating environment, even if this may take a little bit longer to produce the desired effect. The result, however, will be excellent. To explain what is actually going on I will have to be a little technical, so bear with me for the next few paragraphs.

Kid Pix Studio saves its Paint-a-Picture files in the .bmp format. This actually stands for BitMaP, and practically means that the picture is saved as a grid of dots, or squares. If you were to zoom in on the picture, you would just see an array of blocks, all in different colours, which together make up the picture just like a mosaic. There are other graphic formats which do away with the *blockish* effect and actually render pictures more accurately; but these are not supported by *Kid Pix Studio*. These formats are *vector-based*, and rather than rendering the picture as a sequence of dots or squares, they actually use mathematical formulae to work out the lines and curves of the picture. When the picture is zoomed in or out, the curves are mathematically reworked on the fly, and so the picture will always appear smooth.

The problem is that TrueType Fonts, the standard font type used for the majority of *Windows* applications, are actually vector-based graphics. This is why they always render perfect images when printed, whatever the size. So *Kid Pix Studio*, which is a bitmap-based application, is not able to read these fonts. Instead, it has its own bitmap versions of some of them, limited to only one particular size. If these are used with the Zooming Tool, the results may sometimes be unreadable.

The problem is partially solved in *Kid Pix Deluxe*, currently available in the Year 3 and 4 classes. *Kid Pix Deluxe* enables the user to access the TrueType Fonts available on the system, at whatever the size. What *Deluxe* does, however, is save the combined graphic and text elements of a picture *separately*. If you reload a picture with TrueType Fonts in *Kid Pix Deluxe*, there is no problem. But if you load a *Deluxe*-created picture into *Studio* or any other bitmap-reading software, you will find that any TrueType text originally typed into the *Deluxe* picture is lost. In short, suppose you wish to export some *Deluxe* pictures containing text

Fig1: This is the graphic side of the file: it was created in Kid Pix Studio using the Stamp and Rectangle Tools as normal, and then saved.

Daħħal il-kliem fil-kaxxi

żunżana **saħħara** **għasfur** **ġemel**

Fig2: The same file was then loaded into Paint and the text added in using one of the Maltese TrueType Fonts installed in the system.

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into a *PowerPoint* slide show, you will find that any text created in *Deluxe* cannot be read by *PowerPoint*.

What we need, therefore, is something that can recognise TrueType Fonts (unlike *Studio*) but which can then integrate the fonts with the rest of the picture as part of the bitmap (unlike *Deluxe*). The very simple answer for this is *Microsoft Paint*.

Paint is a very rudimentary bitmap graphics program which is available from the *Windows* Accessories menu. So it is free, and you already have it in your *Windows* system. Albeit lacking in terms of graphic effects and features, it does give you the opportunity to access any installed TrueType Fonts. Simply click on the Text Button, click somewhere on the screen, and type away.

While you are still typing you can backtrack and delete as necessary.

The text area expands accordingly. But once you click away from the text, there is no way of editing it short of covering it up and typing all over again. This is because as soon as you click away from the text, *Paint* transforms it into part of the bitmap picture. You may not be able to edit the text later, but once you save the bitmap, the text is not lost if you load it into another application.

So, whenever you need to use Maltese text for a *Kid Pix* on-screen activity, you can simply create a graphics-only bitmap in *Kid Pix*. You can then load the picture into *Paint*, select a Maltese TrueType Font and size, and insert the text where necessary.

When you load the re-saved bitmap into *Kid Pix*, this will include the TrueType text.