



## *Piloted with Teachers, Tested with Children*

At Pearson, we place great value on our relationship with teachers, and strive to involve teachers extensively in the research and development process that is behind everything we publish. Islands is the result of a lengthy and intensive research process which has helped produced a wonderful, genuinely new, and truly innovative learning experience for children learning English in Spain.

This process is very much about listening and learning from people who have spent many years and countless hours working with children in the classroom. We support and recognize this experience and expertise and are very grateful for the professional advice and input this lends us, as it helps us produce better materials which then lead to better results in the classroom, and happier, more successful teachers and learners.

The research and development process for Islands was a long one which began in the summer of 2009. Around 300 teachers took part in an online survey which asked questions about many aspects of Primary ELT materials and which helped inform the basic curriculum of the course. However, we realized we need to go deeper than that, and interact on a face to face level with teachers.

We held a series of Focus Groups, structured moderated discussions with smaller groups of teachers which looked at some of the early prototypes of the Islands course. Not all of the initial feedback we got was positive, and it was clear that we needed to make a number of changes in response to the input we had gathered from the teachers who participated. This then led to the creation of subsequent prototypes of the course, which were then tested and **piloted** again with further groups of teachers.

As Islands is a truly unique course which blends together everything that is great about teaching and learning in the classroom with an online component, we needed to go further than that still. And we realized that, although we'd worked closely with teachers we needed to include another group of people who will be the most closely connected group to this Online World – the pupils themselves.

In 2009 and 2010 we conducted User Testing with Poptropica, the hugely popular online world for children that the online component for Islands is based upon. The results surprised us – although Poptropica is designed for native English speaking children, we found that pupils whose first language is not English could also find it to be a fun, engaging and educational experience. With the kind cooperation of some of the pupil's parents, we were able to capture some wonderful images of them using Poptropica.



This experience led us to a stage where by the time we created the 'ELT Version' of Poptropica –Island Online World– we knew what to expect when we took the early Beta versions of this to further groups of real pupils.

Again we found that for the most part, the pupils loved practicing their English in the Online World and many of them spoke to us effusively about how much fun they'd had, how they'd been challenged, and how they'd worked to solve problems. And also, pupils were at times brutally honest with us about letting us know which parts of our early Beta version they didn't like. This was invaluable, as this enabled us then to go back to the developers and make recommendations for changes and alterations.



Islands is therefore the product of a lengthy journey for Pearson and a good, solid learning process for us. We know that teachers will love the course for its rich, engaging content and it's inclusion of subject material from other areas of education such as Science, Math and Art. Teachers will also love it for its well-organized Synthetic Phonics syllabus and commitment to meaningful learning outcomes through the inclusion of "I can" statements. And we know that students, parents and teachers alike will love it for its unique, groundbreaking online component that brings a whole new, blended learning experience to the teaching of English with children.