Background

This focus group project was conducted in a middle-class primary school with a total of 180 students. ICT is a large part of student learning across all ages and is currently used to enhance a number of national curriculum subjects. All students used in this project own a minimum of one computer in their family home and use the computer a minimum of once daily.

Project Overview

This project was conducted over three planned lessons and was piloted using one year 5 class (aged 9-10 years old) and one year 6 class (aged 10-11 years old). Year 5 and year 6 pupils were taught separately to allow independent learning. Previous learner experience of a computer programming application consists of Flowel4 only.

**Lesson 1:**

Specific learning Intention:

* I can navigate my way around Scratch.

Related success criteria:

* I can find the control to start a Scratch script.
* I can find add a new sprite from a file.
* I can change the stage.

It was important for me to use the initial introduction to Scratch as an exploration lesson. I wanted to assess student’s existing computer knowledge and speed at which students could learn Scratch and to what degree. For this reason, I demonstrated story examples and what I thought were the important Scratch features including script, stage and sprite. I shared some technical vocabulary with the students and encouraged them to use the language throughout the lesson especially when demonstrating completed work to peers.

The plenary was an imperative part of this lesson because it allowed me to assess students learning as well as give students the opportunity to peer assess. All students met the specific learning intention. Student assessment throughout and during plenary was integral to me as the teacher for further lesson planning.

**Lesson 2**

Specific Learning Intention:

* I can begin to use a sprite and stage to create a short story scene.

Related success criteria:

* I can control a sprite using a script
* I can upload a complementary stage

Lesson two began in the same way as lesson one and students were immediately excited to learn that we would be continuing with Scratch. I very briefly recapped the key features of Scratch and instructed students to consider using their new skills to create a short story scene. I decided to allow the learners to choose their own story specifics due to the varied interests in each group. I also thought this would provide a better overview of individual student knowledge of Scratch. I did however demonstrate my own story scene and allow students some time to discuss ideas amongst peers.

The plenary was key to lesson two. The majority of students had begun to create a good story scene and so it was both useful and inspiring for the students to assess peer work. Learners were engaged in both giving and receiving feedback. Although controversial in some areas of the national curriculum, I encouraged students to “steal” ideas from each other for use in their own Scratch story scene during plenary. All students met the specific lesson criteria in lesson two.

**Lesson 3**

Specific learning intentions

* I can use audio in my short story scene.

Related success criteria:

* I can choose appropriate audio to complement my Scratch short story scene.

Due to the speed that students had learnt to use Scratch, I decided to focus the final lesson on audio. Some students had already begun to enquire about audio files during lesson two. Fortunately, this school was well equipped with ICT equipment allowing a microphone per student. This may not always be the case and so audio may be a feature to be integrated over a course of lessons to allow microphones to be shared. I began the lesson by demonstrating to the whole group how to record and upload an audio file into Scratch. Students grasped this with ease. I then placed the audio file into an example story scene and demonstrated the importance of inserting the audio file into the script. The bulk of both focus groups had completed a short scene including some audio by the end of this lesson.

The final plenary was used to show and tell story scenes. Students moved around the ICT suite considering peer work. We then evaluated the Scratch application as a whole class, commenting of both the positive and negative aspects.

Recommendations from Experience

Even though initially I decided to allow students the freedom and flexibility to create a scene theme of their choice, I feel it would be beneficial, given more time, to provide students with a more organised start to the project. By planning a beginning, middle and end to a scene using a provided planning template, students may produce a better quality piece of work and furthermore this may give less able learners more structure. However, it would be crucial to dedicate a whole lesson to planning, especially for younger or less able students. As well as providing a planning template, it may be preference to suggest story topics currently being taught in another area of the curriculum e.g. Egyptians or Rivers.

I considered allowing students to work in partners during this short project and although this particular focus group consisted of majority ICT literate students, there were a few pupils who did not grasp all of the concepts immediately. In my opinion, partnering these students would have hindered their learning because; they were eventually able to independently produce a piece of computer programming work. Furthermore, the time set aside to assess peer work at the end of each lesson was invaluable to low ability students. This vital time allowed them to become motivated, “steal” ideas and learn about different features from peers. A future recommendation for Scratch, considering this area, would include “Cloud” access. This would then give students the opportunity to work in groups individually. This would also be especially beneficial in creating whole class, whole school or inter-school projects.

As this was a new application for the students, I believed it important to set achievable targets each lesson. I discussed the specific learning intentions at the start of the lesson so that students were aware of exactly what was expected of them. Since working with this focus group, I have learnt the importance of setting differentiated success criteria. Some students were able to meet the lesson objective immediately and so I verbally stretched them. It would be preferred to demonstrate the extension work from the beginning of the lesson. Providing the students with levelled success criteria would be idyllic. E.g.:

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| C:\Users\ce12amc\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary Internet Files\Content.IE5\JATQH676\MC900432630[1].png | Lesson 3 - Success Criteria: | |
| **Level 1** | Chose suitable sounds from a bank to express your ideas. Record short speech. |
| **Level 2** | Produce a simple presentation incorporating sounds that you have captured, or created. |
| **Level 3** | Create a simple podcast/scene, selecting and importing already existing music and sound effects as well as recording your own. Create multiple track compositions that contain a variety of sounds. |
| **Level 4** | Use ICT to compose appropriate music for podcasts/scenes and evaluate its impact. |
| **Level 5** | Manipulate music and sounds to enhance presentations/ films/images/photos relevant to audiences and purpose. |

(Taken from the National Curriculum level and extract from attainment targets)

A particular concern during this focus group project included time. Consequently, students decided to use the ICT suite during lunch break to complete their story scenes. Much to my surprise, this included low ability learners. I would recommend a minimum of a term to complete a quality story taking advantage of all the features of Scratch for KS2 learners. Given more time overall, I would dedicate a larger portion of each lesson to peer assessment. Using tools such use PMIQ charts would not only benefit student Scratch projects, but also provide time for further skills development such as Speaking and Listening (EN1). It was important for the success of student projects to allow time each lesson for peer discussion. Sharing and “stealing” ideas from each other was crucial in the progression of pupil outcome.

Due to the nature and structure of this project, I was able to assess students throughout the lesson. In reflection, I would provide clear guidelines the LSA for assessing to allow me to work with and provide more in-depth Scratch knowledge to particular students. This would further benefit the students and I would still be able to check learner progress for further planning during plenary.