

MindGame

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Overview

MindGame is based on the board game Othello, but instead of just placing a piece and turning the opposition pieces, a question has to be answered for each piece turned. These questions are based on the twenty or so categories included for each level and are mainly grammatical. This single CD-ROM contains five different levels which are labelled from elementary up to advanced. As the labels suggest this product was not designed specifically for the UK market, but this does not detract from its functionality. However the real strength of this product is the ability to add your own category to reflect the work you want pupils to revise. This "authoring program" is intuitive and easy to use, and is probably the most useful feature of the software. But if this is the case for most teachers then there would seem to be little point in buying the compilation 5 level CD - a single level will be sufficient if all you intend to do is write your own revision questions.

The software is suitable for pair work in a computer lab, for individual homework (this assumes pupils have access to the network from elsewhere - unlikely in most school set-ups) and for self study. The publisher recommends the product for use with shy students who are reluctant to speak out in class.

As it stands the product offers a number of useful categories from singular/plural, through past, verbs, nouns and slang up to abstracts. This covers work in the Scottish 5-14 syllabus at level A upward, as well as KS2 to KS4, although it is unlikely that a mixed ability class would be comfortable with any one category without the teacher building in differentiation.

The product needs answers to be typed accurately or the answer is rejected - this is a major drawback at lower stages and for lower ability pupils. There is an option to ignore case sensitive answers but it might be better if pupils could simply choose from a number of options to ensure knowledge and not spelling is the criteria for success.

In practice I have found the best use of this product to be as extension material for pupils who complete tasks ahead of schedule, or for pupils to use as a revision task in personal study time. Pupils enjoy the competitive element of the game, especially when playing against a fellow student.

The producers have tried to make the product appealing by replacing the black and white disks of Othello with a choice of paired images. I found these to be annoying and distracting but pupils accepted them readily, perhaps because they had not previously been exposed to Othello. Backgrounds can also be selected, but in practice pupils simply accepted the default screen. A minor irritation is the size of the board - the product only opens in a window and the board is around half the size of the window.

To conclude, this is a useful product with a definite niche - revision in an enjoyable environment. I would not use it to teach your pupils anything new, but it should encourage them to revise to find the information necessary to play. It is useful that questions repeat as a square is turned from symbol to symbol as this repetition aids retention of knowledge. The game layout itself is simple and uncluttered and it is fairly straightforward to master. Teachers with enough time to devise their own games will be able to take full advantage of MindGames by using the simple authoring program.

Written by

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Image



Publisher

Clarity Language
Consultants Ltd

Subject

English
Information and
Communication Technology
Cross Curricular

Key Stage

Key Stage 2 / P3 - P6
Key Stage 3 / P7 - S2
Key Stage 4 / S3 - S4
Post-16 / S4 - S5

Product Code

CLAR-MINDGAME

The software was used over a two month period in two locations. It was installed on a classroom set of 20 computers in the English department and on 5 computers within the Support for Learners department. The English computers were used by pupils from S1 to S5 (English year 8 - 12?) as an extension exercise at the end of double periods. Most pupils spent 10 - 15 minutes per session on the program. The SFL computers were also used with pupils from S1 to S5 mainly working in pairs but sometimes individually. These pupils would interact with the program for 20 - 30 minutes on average.

Labour saving aspects

Once you have decided what game pupils will be playing it is simply a matter of making sure they choose that option when logging in to the game. There is potential here for pupils to elect to choose a different set of questions.

You have access to questions authored by other staff members which can be a useful time saver.

Learning outcomes

I found this product to be very useful in reinforcing learning. By the very nature of the game questions are repeated and pupils who could not answer the first time have retained the information given by the computer when letting them know the first answer was incorrect.

Opportunities exist to choose specific activities to match the learning outcomes of your in class curriculum. I used the jobs set of questions in the elementary level to introduce pupils to the concept of work as an introduction to their Work Experience placement. This worked very well as an awareness raiser.

The lower intermediate exercises on spelling were used successfully with a dyslexic pupil to reinforce specific words - pupil specific question sets were constructed for this purpose. Spelling accuracy increased over the 2/3 months of the trial from around 1 word in 10 to almost 9 in 10.

The authoring package allows teachers to tailor specific questions to a learning outcome.

Student Response

Pupils were very positive about this product. They embraced the game and played without really realising the amount of learning that was going on. There was a marked improvement in their recall after only a couple of games at any particular level.

I had pupils coming to my room at lunchtime to play and others chose to play it during the Friday Games Club instead of a PlayStation.

I was pleased that pupils could roam around the product without causing any damage, and without being able to access the authoring program which was available to staff only.

Assessment and pupil tracking opportunities

Pupils are given a score and time for completion of each game. High scores are available in top ten form for each game, and overall top threes are viewable. you can access graphical representations of performance and find out where pupils were having the most difficulty.

It is important that pupils remember that scores are dependent on the opposition and the game play as well as their actual knowledge. You can get every question right and still lose if your opponent is more skillful in choosing where to place his pieces. When playing against a computer three levels of computer skill are offered.

Correlations between age groups and over time are not really possible without transferring data elsewhere to manipulate. Since pupils will generally be working on different exercises on each visit to the game it is not really possible to track progress unless a pupil is restricted to one set of questions and retested at intervals. This would destroy the spontaneity of the game and remove much of its attraction to children.

Special needs

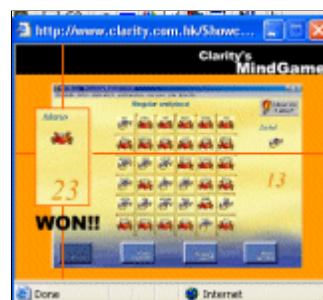
The greatest difficulty for special educational needs pupils lies in the need to type accurate answers. A useful future amendment would be a choice menu from which the pupil selects an answer after having heard them read by the computer. Some questions have a spoken option but this is an exception rather than a rule. SEN pupils enjoyed playing against other pupils using a teaching assistant to input answers. The variety of levels

and range of question sets easily allow suitable activities to be selected.

Content and design

Schemes of work supported

MindGames is not designed to complement specific schemes of work but the wide range of topics should allow it to be used in most situations. Where specific vocabulary is required a suitable game can be quickly authored.



Literacy

The cursors flash to indicate whose turn it is. If an unsuitable square is chosen a help message appears, and also to let pupils know when no move is possible and they have to miss a turn. Some questions have an audio option but many do not. When an activity is completed there is a "What's Next?" option which allows for future work by the pupil if their interest has been gained. These can be printed off to complete away from the PC.

Cursors and backgrounds can be altered to suit different pupils, and sound can be turned off or on.

Numeracy

This program is not designed to help with numeracy, and few aspects lend themselves to this area of the curriculum. There are questions sets on days and months that involve simple arithmetic and time calculations, and others on weights and measures. It would be possible to author a game for numeracy if this was required. One example would be comparing fractions to percentages.

Design and navigation

I found the design a bit uninspiring but pupils quickly became engaged with the game and they were happy with the appearance on the whole, although older pupils commented that some of the icons were a little young for them. Pupils found it easy to play the game and navigate into help menus and reports etc.

On some games a number of different answers are accepted by the computer - e.g. chef and cook, which is very useful.

When playing a different level of the game pupils had to exit and restart the program. This was not a major time concern on the school network as the whole process took about fifteen seconds. If playing games at the same level it is simply a matter of choosing new game from the menu.

Ease of installation

The programme was installed on the network by the school computer technician who reported a simple installation with no problems. The game ran on every occasion it was accessed and no difficulties were encountered. The interim report was based on a stand alone version installed on my home PC. Again this was installed and operated with no problems.

Support materials

Installation instructions are included, with game play and authoring instructions and explanatory diagrams. There is a good help system within the game.

Suitable for ages

10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18

Planning

The game is very easy to learn and should only take a few minutes to explain. A practical demonstration is the best way to introduce pupils to the game. The amount of planning time required depends on whether or not you are authoring a game or letting pupils play a preloaded set of questions. If the latter then a few

minutes browsing the options is all that is required.

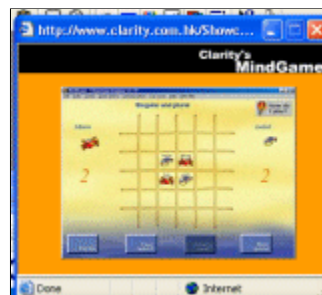
Authoring is straightforward but the length of time is very variable, depending on number and complexity of questions. I found it took me around twenty minutes to author a game, which is then available at any future time.

Publisher Information

Clarity Language Consultants Ltd



Clarity has been developing effective educational software since 1992. We specialise in MFL and ESOL and currently have four series of language programs registered for COL. Our fifth COL program, Author Plus Online, enables teachers to create interactive activities for all subjects from Year 3 to Year 13 (see www.AuthorPlus.com). We provide lots of teacher support for all our programs!



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Purchasing Information

Please either send us an email directly (info@clarity.com.hk) or following the below steps:

Step 1-

Go to Clarity products page:

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There is a "Price enquiry" button on every page, click on it.

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Fill in the form and our sale representative will send you the price list within one working day.