

AI2 is awesome but... the blocks editor could use improvement

Ghica van Emde Boas
Bronstee.com
Frans Lisztlaan 5
2102 CJ Heemstede
Netherlands

emdeboas@bronstee.com

A close friend of my son, a good programmer with his own IT-company, had a stroke at age 35, resulting in severe brain damage. He cannot speak and he is partly paralyzed. However, he understands everything you say to him. His still very limited reading and writing capabilities are very slowly improving.

As a 69 years old grandmother, retired after a long career in software development, I thought I could try to communicate with him via a shared expertise: programming. We started with Scratch. **It was a big success and he enjoyed it a lot.** But Scratch proved to be too limiting in functionality.

We switched to AppInventor and after a few examples we started out on programming his own spelling exercise: an adaptation of the “Shooter” game, where you have to shoot letters in the right order, to form a word.

We seem to be hitting a ceiling now using the blocks editor:

- The code blocks take quite a bit more space than what fits on my laptop screen.
- While adding blocks the work area becomes partly invisible.
- Often a lot of scrolling is needed, using one of the many really thin scrollbars.

I cringed to see him struggle.

Looking back at Scratch, which is of course very similar to AppInventor, it is clear what could be done to improve the blocks editor of AI2, and I cannot imagine that it will be very difficult.

The poster will show with screenshots and mock-ups what the “word-shoot” app currently looks like and what it could look like in an improved blocks editor.

I also hope to discuss how AI2 could be more easily used by people with limited reading capabilities.