# Educational robots for teaching programming

## Aims and Objectives

The Aim of this project is to enhance computer science by integrating user friendly programming languages with robots.

**Objectives**

* To understand the Scratch API and the relevant robot API.
* To adapt scratch to use a similar structure to the robot with custom blocks.
* To Integrate Scratch and the robotic platform by producing a piece of software.
* To create materials for a session to test the usability of the software.
* To run a usability session and evaluate the result.

## Background

Programming and computer skills are becoming increasingly important as the influence of the internet and the power of computers grow, programming has even been called the 'second literacy'. Despite this there are still significant barriers to education in this field and few attempts to integrate it in to other computer related topics. This project will use the language Scratch and the Thymio II as they have both been shown to be good at introducing people to the topic of programming and robots as well as maintaining interest and creating enthusiasm.

Scratch is a language developed at MIT which has been used in education with broad success. Scratch allows for the use of most programming concept without requiring the user to be aware of syntax through the use of blocks. As well as being easy to use it is also free to use and has a large community with a wide range of users from 4 year olds to 60 meaning support can be found relating to the most basic of tasks to complex ones. One study found that during a Harvard Summer School for Computer Science course that 76% of students felt that using scratch as an introduction help them when they later moved on to java, students also found it was more rewarding to have visual feedback on what they had programmed than just having a text window (Malan and Leitner, 2007).

Amongst the reasons why teachers don't accept technology in to the class as readily as they do other tool are stress and fear of failure. Trying to teach something with which you have little experience in can be daunting and trying to learn a new topic can cause stress. Introducing people to scratch has both caused people to be more likely to include programming in lessons and to worry about failing less when they consider education in programming. A study of students learning to become preschool teachers were given a introductory lesson in computer programming and found that interest in using technology in the classroom increased from 80% to 92%. As well as this they found that 65% found scratch easy to use and 85% found it simple and understandable (Fesakis and Kiriaki, 2009).

One challenge facing robotics in education is the price of the platforms and how easy they are to use. The Thymio II can be bought for around £100 which is cheaper than alternatives such as the LEGO Mindstorm while still having most of the feature. Besides the LEGO robot there are few available robotics platforms that are simple enough that they can be used for an introduction to the topic while also being in depth enough that they can perform complex programs. The Thymio II is a capable system and with scratch would mean that it can be easily picked up while still being able to perform some complicated programs. Scratch can create object orientate programs and is seen to have one major limitation which is recursion which has been purposely left out so that beginners would not feel threatened (Harvey, B. and Mönig, J. 2010).

Robots have been used before with other aspects of programming to create courses that have proven to create very enthusiastic students. For example, at the University of Lincoln robotics was taught alongside computer vision, this lead to positive results in practical and some students going far beyond the brief of their assignments. (Cielniak, G. and Bellotto, N. et al, 2013), this suggests that enthusiasm can be created with practical assignments using robots.

The Thymio II is a programmable robot with a wide variety of sensors and methods for feedback. It has 2 wheels for movement, a speaker for audio output and several light, some of which are programmable and others which indicate the feedback from the distance sensors. There are 9 distance sensors to prevent it from falling off objects and to detect thing in front or behind it. It also has a 3 axis accelerometer, a microphone and an infrared sensor for remote input. With all these feature the Thymio II is well suited to education as it can be applied to a lot of situations. The Thymio II is the result of testing amongst children with the Thymio I. After running courses with the Thymio 89.2% of parents thought the session was educational and 78.5% thought that it had increased their child's interest in robotics (Riedo, F. and Rétornaz P. et al 2012)

## Methods: development

## Methods: evaluation

## Risk assessment and contingency plans

During this project there are several risks that could cause setbacks and potentially jeopardise the project, to prevent and prepare for these I will list the most likely to occur, what I will do to prevent them and what I will do to recover from them.

### Loss of data

Loss of data could lead to serious setbacks and could result from lost hardware or hardware failures. To reduce the risk I will make use of several methods to store my files. Firstly I will use a memory stick to store a physical copy and copy any files to my computer. As well as this I will make use of GitHub and store all of my files online so they can be accessed from anywhere. If I do loos some progress due to hardware failure then I will make use of a back up and proceed from where I can. With these precautions, serious data loss should very unlikely and no more than 2 hours of work is likely to be lost.

### Illness and injury

I could potentially become ill or injured at any time and there is little that can be done to prevent this. To reduce the risk I will allow for contingency time to make up for lost time while ill or injured.

### Unexpected challenges

During the project some challenges may arise that had not been foreseen, this could include aspects of the project that were underestimated and events that occur beyond my control. As these can't be predicted or prevented I will make use of contingency time to make up for lost time due to these events.

### Increased work load

As I will be studying other modules at the same time as this project I might end up with a large workload leading to delays. To prevent this I will make use of the hand in dates spread sheet to ensure that project deadlines do not conflict with other deadlines. As well as this I will structure my weeks so that I will be able to do both

### Contingency

Contingency time is an important part of the project as it allows time to deal with unexpected problems and to review the work done up to that point. I will assign Contingency for the week at the end of each task on the weekend so I will have 2 full days for catching up or review of my work so far as well as any adjustments to my plan.

## Gantt chart

## A:\Users\Adam\Desktop\gantt1.png

## References

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Cielniak, G., Bellotto, N. and Duckett, T. (2013) Integrating mobile robotics and vision with undergraduate computer science. *Education, IEEE Transactions on* 56(1) 48-53.

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