

kar2ouche and special needs



It may be a truism to say that all children have special educational needs, but it does mean that teachers are always considering ways of differentiating the lessons that they teach in order to meet the requirements of individual pupils. A totally flexible learning and teaching tool, Kar2ouche is easily adapted to these needs so that the teacher and/or learning support assistant can create lessons that appeal to the full ability range from the least to the most able.

However, looking at the more widely used definition of special needs as referring to those pupils who experience some kind of sensory or learning difficulty, on average 20% of pupils in comprehensive schools fall into this category. A number of studies have shown that computers can enhance the learning experience of these children.

‘From 1988-90 the Palm Project explored the effects of computers on pupils’ autonomy in learning. The project found that pupils not only were more autonomous but also more motivated.’

Glendon Ben Franklin in Leask, M Ed. (2001) *Issues in Teaching Using ICT*, Routledge.

In particular, multi-media products, such as Kar2ouche, appeal to a wide range of learning styles and have the advantage of being able to reinforce learning in a multi-sensory way through the use of visual and auditory stimuli. The fact that Kar2ouche enables pupils to create storyboards, animations and publications, plus manipulate and interpret text, also appeals to those with a preference for a kinaesthetic approach to learning.

Special needs children are often prevented from functioning effectively in lessons because much of the work required is based on reading and writing, skills that are often under-developed. In Kar2ouche all of the text is provided with a sound file so that pupils can access information even if their reading skills are impaired. Listening to increasingly complex texts extends a pupil's vocabulary whilst also increasing his or her attention span. By following the text as they listen, pupils begin to recognise words and are provided with a real context for their learning.

In addition Kar2ouche enables children to record their own voices, thus providing an alternative to writing. This provides immediate gratification and the ability to communicate with their peers in a way that increases their confidence. ‘Nothing motivates children with special needs more than success, especially when their peer group can see that success is demonstrated on an equal basis without allowances being made.’ (Angela McGlashon in Gamble, N and Easingwood, N (2000) *ICT and Literacy*, Continuum) Once confidence has been built, the speech and thought bubbles offer the opportunity for pupils to write in small bite-size chunks. This can be increased gradually by requiring pupils to produce a paragraph in the caption window and subsequently maybe use the writing frames and scaffolds provided in the education support packs that accompany the software.

The sound files and recording facility can therefore be seen to enable the learner to develop greater independence and this encourages them to continue with tasks that may once have been beyond them. Using Kar2ouche makes a range of curriculum areas far more accessible to non-readers and also to children whose first language is not English. These children often find reading the language far more difficult than speaking it.

As well as children with learning difficulties, Kar2ouche enhances the learning of children with behavioural problems, such as attention deficiency syndrome. In trials, these pupils found the multi-sensory and creative approach motivating, non-threatening and rewarding. It has been shown in a range of research that, pupils who experience difficulties interacting socially often find using computers less intimidating or confusing. However, ideal for pair or small group work, Kar2ouche can be used by the teacher to encourage collaborative learning thereby supporting these pupils as they begin to develop the ability to express themselves in a social situation. Having rehearsed ideas in a small group they are then more confident when required to present their ideas to the class or an adult.

For pupils with visual impairment, the teacher can go into the password-protected area to increase the size of the font. The sound files also help these children. Likewise the brief sound-clips support dyslexic children many of whom find processing large amounts of information in a single unit difficult. They can also control the pace of the reading and repeat it as necessary thus allowing them to consolidate learning. For those whose hearing is impaired the combination of text and exciting visual material is motivating and by being able to attach pre-recorded sound files, pupils are provided with an effective means to communicate with their hearing peers. The record and playback facility also allows children with less severe hearing problems to rehearse their enunciation in a safe environment before sharing with others.

Every effort has been made to make Kar2ouche a fully flexible learning and teaching tool, to enable children of all abilities to have fun whilst engaging in activities that challenge them appropriately as they develop skills, knowledge and understanding in a range of curriculum subjects. To this end we are continuing to listen to teachers, support research projects and use findings to develop additional features that will help to move learning forward.

For further information on Kar2ouche or any Immersive Education products contact:

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