1-      In general, would you say that Digital Mysteries is a useful learning tool for the students?

2-      Would you consider using a multi-mouse version of Digital Mysteries in some of your own sessions if the school bought it?

3-      If so, how many times per term (or per year) would you imagine conducting Digital Mysteries sessions?

4-      What would you consider the main strength(s) of Digital Mysteries is/are? Is it the support for collaboration, or the higher level thinking (or any other aspect)?

5-      What do you think are the most negative aspects that we need to address?

6-      We have an authoring tool that allows students to create their own mysteries. Is this something that you would be interested in having students do as an assignment at home or during the class? Would you consider that to be a good way to do project-based-learning scenario where some students create mysteries for others to solve.

7-      How do you think the use of Digital Mysteries relates to OFSTED? Does it positively or negatively affect OFSTED evaluations?

8-      Are there features of the product that you want changed or added?

9-      We are working on a teacher tool that allows the teacher to freeze (locks) the students machines and to have some summary information about their progress. Do you see this as a useful tool (to be used from the teacher’s desk) or would you rather walk around the groups and see what they are doing? In other words, did you feel a need for a teacher control panel to control and monitor the classroom?

Here is my response to the questions so far: I will be collecting in and marking the final written outcome tomorrow, so may have more points to make in light of that, but here goes:

1. I believe the tool has been useful to my class overall. Even allowing the ‘teething troubles’ and initial fears of the students, the majority of them have benefited from the trial, and some have benefited significantly. There is sometimes a ‘honeymoon’ period, gleaned from the novelty of a new technique, but even when that had passed they became quite well versed in using the tool, and at no point did I hear a comment that the process had hindered their learning, or caused them any difficulties. Some may have been more advantaged than others, but I don’t believe any of them redressed as a result of the software.
2. I would like to try the multi-mouse version, as the students themselves (in their feedback) suggested that they found it unfair if the work was not evenly distributed. While it may be a bit of a squeeze to get four of them around a screen, they may also be more comfortable working in this way, as they are more used to PCs that table-top computers.
3. I would have though I would use this at least once during our learning ‘modules’ in English, especially if there was a mystery that related to a text or skill that was the focus that term. Some of the students stated in their feedback that they’d like to use it more often, but I’d be cautious about employing the tool more than twice in a term. Having said that, were the focus to be on AF3 and AF4 in Key Stage 3, there maybe a case for it, especially if I had a class that was struggling with structure.
4. Bearing in mind that I’ve still got one piece of writing to mark, I think that some of my students have really grasped what a well-constructed response looks like, and I’m hoping that this will have a long term effect on their extended writing. I also think it has helped with collaboration and discussion in most instances. I deliberately didn’t place the class in friendship groups, and I was careful to mix the genders where possible, and we have seen some excellent teamwork. We’ve also seen a significant amount of ‘messing about’ from some quarters, i.e. flicking the text boxes around as if they were playing Air Hockey (another reason why I’d like to try the multi mouse version), but this hasn’t been fatal to the success of the group work overall. Where there hasn’t been great collaboration, this has been to do with the personalities of the students, and some will not engage adequately in a task such as this whatever happens, so no software would have been able to create a ‘miracle cure’. I have witnessed some higher level thinking, and been impressed by the connections and statements made.
5. On reflection, the task I created for the Greek Mythology Mystery wasn’t brilliant – it wasn’t clearly defined and accessible enough, and I think this has led to confusion and has affected the quality of their answers. I think the objectives need to be clear and announced, and it would be good if we could find a way to link the AFs for the National Curriculum in English (assuming Idiot Gove hasn’t jettisoned them) more directly to the questions. I’m looking forward to reading the results of the ‘Sport v Library’ debate, as I think this was a much more successful resource.
6. No objection to the idea of an authoring tool.
7. From what I can see, the tool’s ability to check and review progress during the lesson is exactly what OFSTED would be happy to see. I don’t know how it would help students to target their own areas for development on a ‘personal’ level, but it would be very good to help inform planning for a class that had particular areas of focus. The feature which allows the addition and development of their own ideas and statements is also good from the point of view of ‘customised’ resources and learning.
8. I think the printed essay plans could be better – could they take the form of a ‘mind map’ which could be annotated? And could they include – for example – an indication as to the use of language devices, e.g. rhetorical features, emotive language etc.
9. I like to walk around and check on progress during the lesson, but the ability to ‘freeze’ and access students’ progress would be helpful to inform planning and monitoring, and this would benefit preparation for OFSTED.