A Stagecast Retrospective

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Allen Cypher has been invited to present a retrospective of Stagecast Creator – a visual programming environment for children. Creator enables children to create their own interactive simulations and video games by demonstrating what the characters should do. In addition to being a creativity tool, Creator also teaches children the fundamental concepts behind programming, without burdening them with the syntax and vocabulary of a textual programming language. An important part of the Stagecast Creator project is the built-in tutorial, and Allen will discuss the creation and testing of the tutorial. Researchers who tested Creator in classrooms found significant conceptual problems, and their research led to improvements in the language and tutorial. Stagecast Creator started out as KidSim – a research project by Allen Cypher and David Canfield Smith in Apple's Advanced Technology Group in the early '90s. A version called Cocoa was released by Apple, and Creator finally came out as a product from Stagecast Software, Inc. in 1998. Stagecast Creator is being used today in a variety of schools across the U.S., the U.K., and other countries, and it is popular in computer Summer Camps. This talk will include an assessment of the successes and shortcomings of Creator from the perspective of a decade of use. Allen will also discuss and compare Creator with other important visual programming environments for children, such as Agentsheets and ToonTalk. For those of you who attended VL'97, this presentation will offer a chance to recall the "1997 Visual Programming Challenge", where several visual languages competed to control robotic toy cars.