

WEB

ACE Centre

Aids to Communication in Education



**INTRODUCTORY SOFTWARE
FOR CHILDREN WITH
LEARNING DIFFICULTIES**

**Software
Information**

ACE Centre

Aids to Communication in Education

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This survey is designed to help parents, teachers and other professionals make a qualitative judgement on a number of the more substantial programs now available for children and students with learning difficulties. Although some of the programs described may not have originally been intended for use with these children and students, we have included them because we feel that good use can be made of them. The list is by no means comprehensive and will, of course, be enlarged and amended as new developments occur. We have tried to avoid duplication of other ACE information sheets, by selecting and describing in some detail, equipment and software that concentrate on communication skills for the profoundly handicapped while still offering the teacher, therapist or parent considerable flexibility and range in the way concepts are approached. Skills embraced by the hardware and software described in the document include the understanding of cause and effect, attention, co-operation, spatial and perceptual awareness and early language development.

We would of course be very grateful to receive any feedback on the accuracy and usefulness of our survey together with details of programs we might include in future editions.

This document is freely copiable with the one qualification that the ACE Centre would appreciate being contacted if a copy is made. Otherwise we shall not be able to update those who have made copies.





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**SUMMARY**

This is a suite of single switch programs aimed at teaching switch use and developing early language skills.

HARDWARE

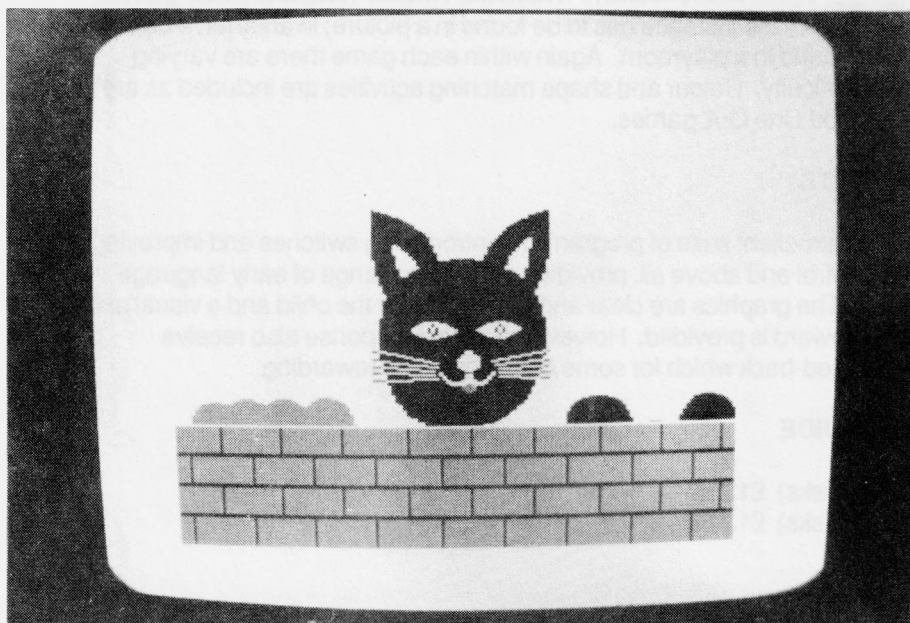
BBC B, B+, Master 128

INPUT

Analogue port switches
User port switches
Concept keyboard
Micromike
Keyboard

OUTPUT

Screen

**SUPPLIER**

WIDGIT Software Ltd, 1 The Ryde, Hatfield, Herts, AL9 5DQ. Tel 07072 64780

DOCUMENTATION

A comprehensive booklet is provided with the program.

DESCRIPTION

Two suites of Blob programs are available. The first is intended as an introduction to the computer and switches for young children; the second particularly emphasises directional manipulation and selection when using a single switch. By using the function keys many levels of each game are available. Common to both suites is the imaginative variety of activities the



child is invited to explore which are designed to encourage conversation, increase attention and stimulate an understanding of cause and effect.

Each disk requires setting up before use. Amongst other things, the scanning delay can be varied and a test is provided so that modifications can be made before using the program. Volume can also be varied. Various keys on the keyboard allow the teacher or therapist to alter, for example, the volume or the speed of the cursor while the child is using the program.

Blob 1 contains two disks and is aimed at teaching the child to control a switch. At the simplest level the child can change Blob's colour with the press of a switch. He can then be asked to move to objects by pressing a switch when an arrow attached to a cursor is pointing in the right direction. Two other games on the first disk encourage switch use and visual discrimination by having animals, and Blob hidden behind objects. The second disk contains pictures which are used to provide memory games. Another game on this disk involves Blob trying to find his way home through a series of carefully graded mazes.

Blob 2 again contains two disks. Programs here require more switch control and greater visual discrimination. There are various 'Hide and Seek' games, where Blob, in one instance has to be found in a picture; in another, a ball has to be found in a playroom. Again within each game there are varying levels of difficulty. Colour and shape matching activities are included as are several 'Odd One Out' games.

COMMENTS

This is an excellent suite of programs for introducing switches and improving switch control and above all, providing an exciting range of early language material. The graphics are clear and interesting for the child and a visual and auditory reward is provided. However incorrect response also receive auditory feed-back which for some children can be rewarding.

PRICE GUIDE

Blob 1 (2 disks) £13.80

Blob 2 (2 disks) £13.80

**SUMMARY**

This software offers a range of programs specifically designed for profoundly handicapped children.

HARDWARE

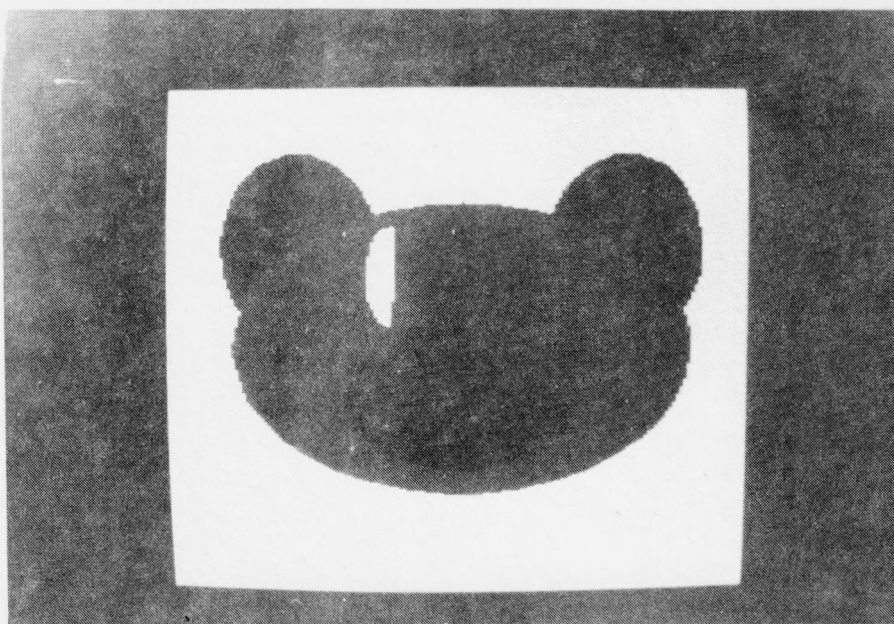
BBC B, B+, Master 128

INPUT

Keyboard
Single switch connected to the user port

OUTPUT

Screen

**SUPPLIER**

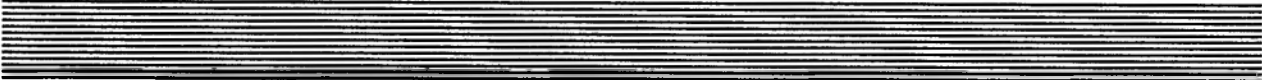
TGW Software Developments, Hillside House, Bratislaw Hospital, Worksop,
Notts. S81 0BD
Tel: 0909 472831 Ext.290

DOCUMENTATION

A comprehensive manual entitled "Computer Assisted Development with Profoundly Retarded Multiply Handicapped Children" is included with the package.

DESCRIPTION

The documentation includes a description of the earliest use of computers with profoundly handicapped children. There are sections on the basic stages of a child's development such as the establishment of eye contact



and the emergence of tracking and other visual-motor skills. Case studies and information on how to record and monitor a child's progress are also included.

There are eight disks available in the suite. They tend to come in pairs, those with sound and those without. Attracting a child to the screen is the aim of the first three disks. A variety of patterns and pictures can be chosen by the teacher to attract the child's attention. The fourth disk involves the child in visually tracking an object across the screen. The teacher can select the direction of tracking. The remaining disks are involved with visual exploration and the refinement of visual motor skills. Again a variety of patterns and pictures can be selected.

COMMENTS

Although these programs cover a wide range of early visual-motor skills, their use is somewhat limited in that many of the programs do not attempt to relate to the experiences of the profoundly handicapped child. However for the limited objective of attracting a child's attention to the screen, these programs do offer some variety.

PRICE GUIDE

£25.00



SUMMARY

The CATCHUP scheme of programs has been designed to help deaf children and other children with specific speech and language disorders to cope with the initial stages of reading and to improve general language development.

HARDWARE

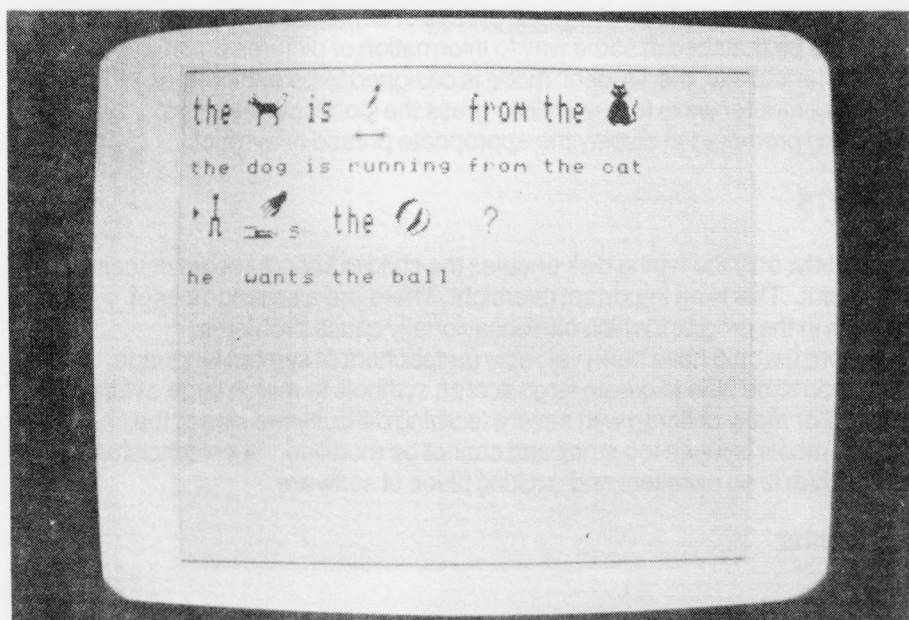
BBC B, B+, Master 128

INPUT

Concept Keyboard

OUTPUT

Screen
Printer
Disk



SUPPLIER


Contact your regional SEMERC or ACE for a list of LEA distribution schools.

DOCUMENTATION

A manual together with A3 (reduced to A4)/A4 overlays is available.

DESCRIPTION

Operated from the Concept Keyboard, many words within the scheme's resident vocabulary have an associated symbol. These symbols are generally self-explanatory and are not related to any specific augmentative symbol system like Bliss or Makaton. It should be stressed, however, that



both words and symbols can be redefined very easily and stored on to a symbol disk. The system is very powerful in allowing the user to animate symbols and thereby, for instance, to manipulate grammatical indicators to suggest past or future tense. New overlays for the Concept Keyboard are relatively easy to produce without any knowledge of programming although there are certain restrictions on the way areas of the overlay can be defined.

The suite begins with the 'Word' disk which uses single words/symbols only and thereafter progresses gradually through to phrases and whole sentences which increase in syntactical complexity. Finally, the child may be ready to use the Concept Keyboard 'Typing' disk which is a simple writing aid enabling text and or symbols to be edited and printed with the option of a multi-layering system to increase the extent and grammatical accuracy of the text.

Throughout the scheme the speed of text/symbol presentation and the method of display can be controlled by the adult. One of its best features is the symbol editor which very simply offers a powerful method of creating and animating new symbols or editing existing ones. All the Catchup disks except the typing and symbol disks offer a choice between 'computer' and 'student' directed modes of use. The former means that the computer displays a prompt in the form of a word, phrase or sentence on the screen which has to be matched in some way to information or pictures on an overlay. Alternatively, the 'student' mode is designed to be exploratory, where the computer waits for the child to press the Concept Keyboard before being prompted to display the appropriate phrase or symbol.

COMMENTS

Unfortunately, only the typing disk enables the child to keep a record of their achievement. This is an important oversight. There are also a number of small bugs in the program which can occasionally cause problems. Furthermore it would have been valuable for teachers of symbol language like Makaton to be able to create large screen symbols to match large overlay symbols. For many children with severe learning difficulty the size of the existing symbols is much too small and cannot be modified. Such criticisms apart Catchup is an excellent and exciting piece of software.

PRICE GUIDE

Available at cost



SUMMARY

This was the first touch sensitive screen to be produced that was both reasonably reliable and relatively inexpensive.

HARDWARE

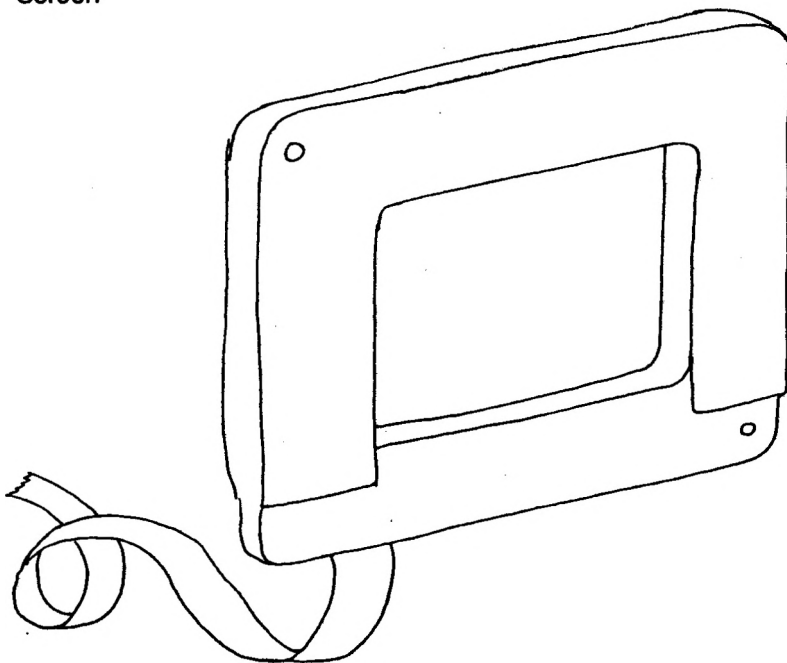
BBC B, B+

INPUT

Cheyne Scribbler touch screen
Connects via 1MHz bus

OUTPUT

Screen



SUPPLIER

John Sanderson, 29 The Heights, Foxgrove Road, Beckenham,
Kent BR3 2BY
Tel. 01 658 0654

DOCUMENTATION


A comprehensive operator's manual is provided.

DESCRIPTION

This touch sensitive screen is both accurate and easy to use although not very robust. It fits over a monitor and responds to the breaking of a grid of infra-red beams by a finger, hand or object such as a pointer.

SOFTWARE

The screen comes complete with a demonstration disk of possible



applications. This is very similar to the disk which comes with the Microvitec touch screen and so has rather limited value for the child with special needs. It has both 'Artist' and 'Music' on it. 'Artist' and 'Music' are very similar to the Microvitec programs, the latter offering no editing or storing facilities, however. The package also contains utility programs, for existing programs to be modified or new ones to be written.

Several programs, entitled 'Early Fingers', have been produced for the Cheyne Scribbler by the Spastics Society and are available through the Blue File distribution scheme. These consist of early learning programs, such as targeting, tracking, matching and sequencing tasks. The targeting program allows children to build up increasing complex pictures; a conceptually very exciting tracking program which invites children, for example, to move a mouse from a random part of the screen to a large piece of cheese with or without obstacles to negotiate; and a number of other programs including early numbers activity. It should be said that the programs are not as well designed or accurate as one might like. However, they do represent some of the most useful touch screen programs as yet written for special needs children.

Much of the University of Birmingham's software (see page 32 for a full description) designed for visually impaired children and selectively suitable for profoundly handicapped children will also run with the Cheyne Scribbler.

COMMENTS

Where the 'Cheyne Scribbler' has advantages over the 'Microvitec Touchscreen', is that it can easily be mounted on to any monitor. To do this a long cable is supplied. However, this is rather inadequate and a frame of some kind would be preferable. Its advantage over the fixed frame of the Microvitec screen is evident if you wish to place objects, raised shapes or textures beneath it or as a simple switch device. But this flexibility can only be properly exploited with appropriate specialised software of which there is still very little.

It could be argued that both the 'Cheyne Scribble' and the 'Microvitec Touchscreen' are, in the light of the somewhat limited software available, still rather a luxury. This is disappointing as the obvious advantages of a device which does not distract a child's attention from the screen, are not being fully exploited.

PRICE GUIDE

£210.00

**SUMMARY**

This is a colour matching, patterning and sequencing program containing different levels of difficulty for one and two switch users.

HARDWARE

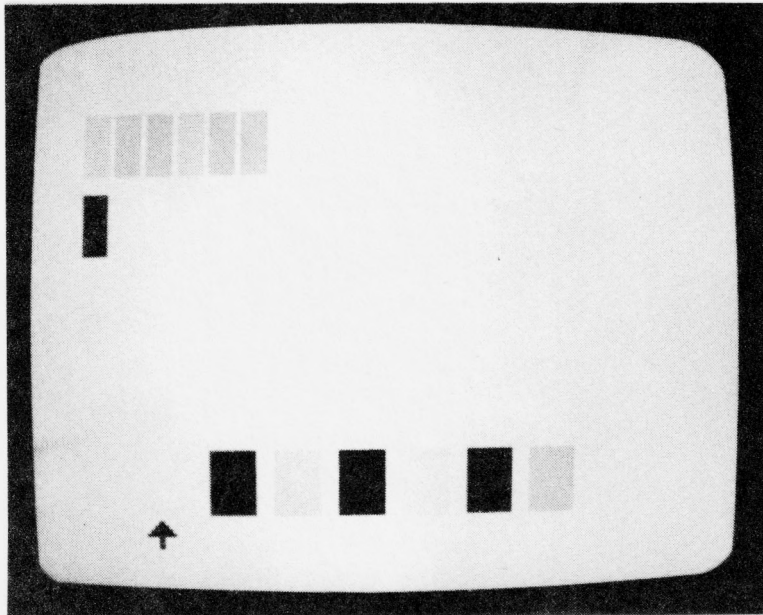
BBC B, B+, Master 128

INPUT

Single/double switches via the user of analogue ports
Keyboard

OUTPUT

Screen
Disk
Printer

**SUPPLIER**


Paul Skinner, Switch Controlled Software, 12 Lower Evingar Street,
Whitchurch, Hants RG28 7BY

DOCUMENTATION

An adequate description of the program's operation is provided.

DESCRIPTION

There are several levels of difficulty in this program. The simplest displays a row of coloured blocks for the child to match by scanning and selecting from another row of colours at the bottom of the screen. Within each game the level of difficulty can be altered. Other activities available include continuing a sequence of colours from a pattern on the screen and a 'Memory Test'.



Here, the user has to remember a sequence of colours. When the switch is pressed the pattern disappears and the user has to display the pattern in the correct order. The child can also make patterns of squares which can be saved and printed.

Several options are available including variable colour, scanning speeds and sound volume. Where an interface box with a toy controller is used there is the option of a toy play reward. A record of results is kept for most of the options which can be printed out.

COMMENTS

This is a highly structured program which provides graded colour matching, patterning and sequencing tasks. The fact that the whole program is content free and therefore very flexible makes it very useful for the identification and resolution of specific areas of difficulty in a child's early cognitive development.

PRICE GUIDE

£8.00

**SUMMARY**

This suite of programs offers a vast array of carefully graded programs which aim to teach the understanding of simple cause and effect, good switch control and develop basic communication skills.

HARDWARE

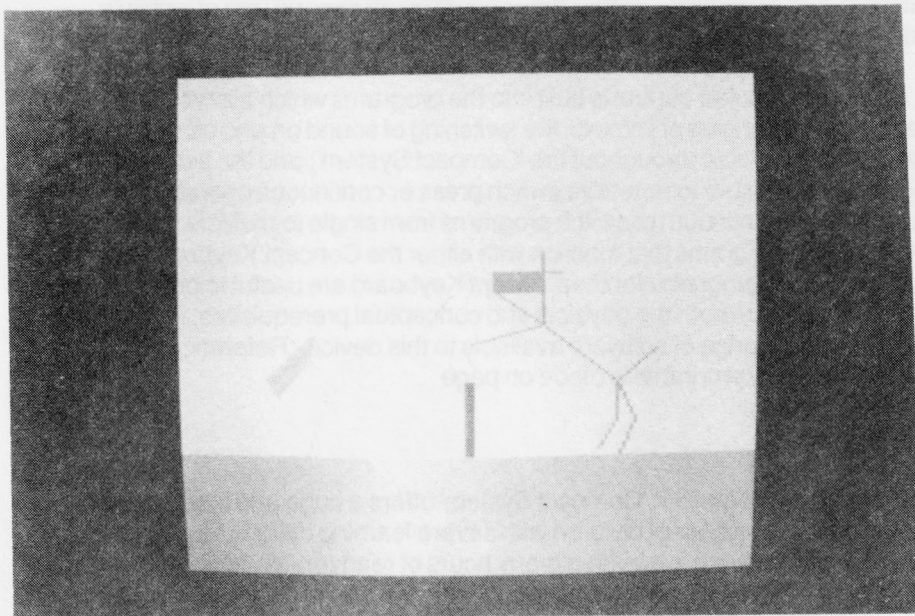
BBC B, B+, Master
RML Nimbus

INPUT

Up to four switches via the user port
Up to two switches via the analogue port fire buttons
Micromike
Star Concept Keyboard, A4 or A3 size
Keyboard

OUTPUT

Screen

**SUPPLIER**

British Institute of Mental Handicap, Wolverhampton Road, Kidderminster,
Worcs DY10 3PP
Tel: 0562 850251

DOCUMENTATION

A comprehensive manual accompanies the programs.

DESCRIPTION

The COMPACT programs which comprise in total some twelve disks or two hundred and twenty five programs, have been developed primarily to give switch users an opportunity to learn early cognitive and communication skills as well as develop learning strategies. All the programs are designed to give control over the computer by means of switch inputs and to encourage the development of problem-solving and decision-making abilities.

Experimentation and exploration are intrinsically rewarded by animated screen activities and displays. The programs are intended by the author to improve motivation, simple communication, attention and gross motor skills.

Essentially the 'Compact System' seeks to develop both communication and problem solving skills through a wide range of activities. Amongst the most interesting are those which simulate a range of real life situations and provide imaginative contexts for communication skills to be explored; people walking, running, swimming; a horse jumping a fence; a ball being thrown up, dropped, then picked up again.

The programs range from single switch to four switch output, requiring switch discrimination of object pictures, action pictures, colours and symbols. It should be emphasised that, although the programs are conceptually simple, they are not intended for isolated use by children nor for use merely as switch training programs. Rather they should be an integral part of a child's early language development.

An element of teacher control is built into the programs which allows, for example, the changing of colours, the switching of sound on and off (this facility is not available throughout the 'Compact System') and the setting of single switches either to repetitive switch press or continuous operation. In addition to the continuum of switch programs from single to multiple input, there are also programs that function with either the Concept Keyboard or Micromike. The programs for the Concept Keyboard are useful to prepare children, who have both the physical and conceptual prerequisites, for the ever increasing range of software available to this device. Reference to the suite's Micromike programs is made on page .

COMMENTS

There is not doubt that the 'Compact System' offers a huge and imaginative resource for the teacher of children with severe learning difficulties. At the press of a switch there are indeed many hours of ready-made activities available to children who otherwise would have no useful access to the computer. There are also opportunities for children to carry out simple decision-making tasks. And despite being amongst the first BBC programs to emerge in the special needs field, they are still amongst the best of the pre-language and early language software currently available. It would be nice if the teacher has a little more control over the programs to allow, for example, the setting up of left/right orientation, the printing of completed pictures of the facility to switch the sound on and off in all the sound generating programs. These are, however, small points and must not detract from the essential soundness and value of this good software.

PRICE GUIDE

£5.00 Compact 1	2 disks	£24.00	Complete Compact
£5.00 Compact 2	2 disks	System 1-4	12 disks
£8.00 Compact 3	4 disks		
£8.00 Compact 4	4 disks		



SUMMARY

Like 'Touch Explorer' (see page 45) this is a program which enables the creation of two or three dimensional stories, pictures and communication 'boards' using both the displayed and spoken word as output.

HARDWARE

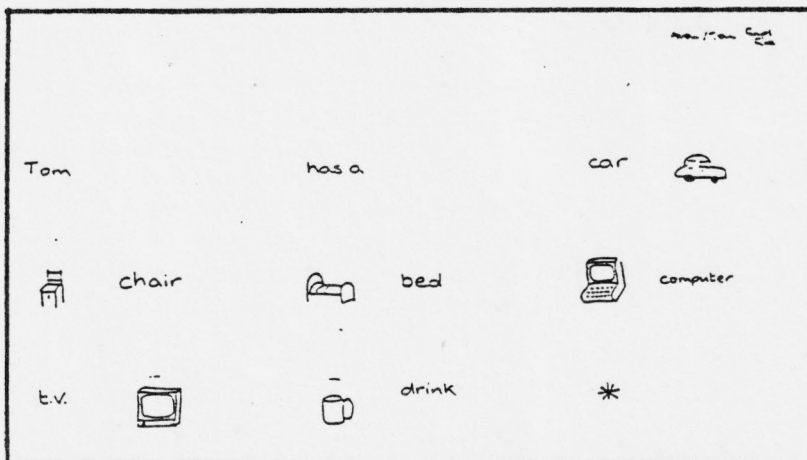
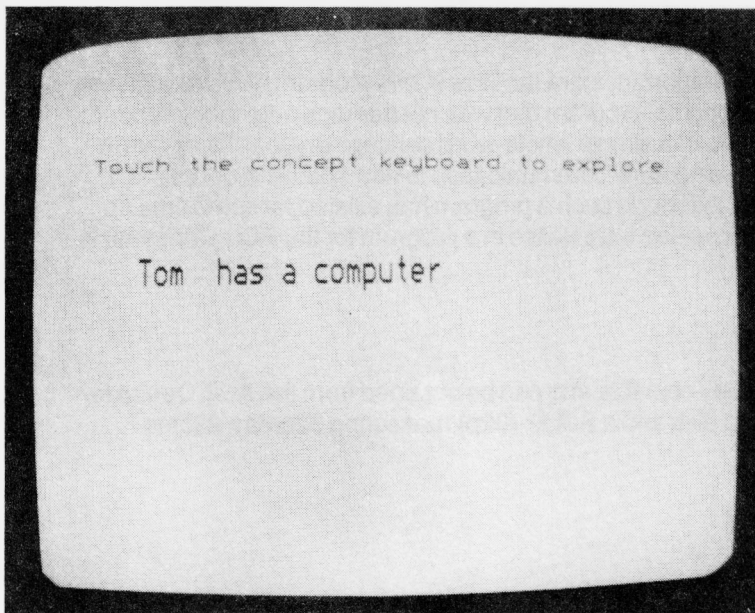
BBC Mode, B, B+, Master 128

INPUT

Concept Keyboard

OUTPUT

Screen
Printer
Disk
Text to speech synthesisers like Votrax or Mimic





SUPPLIER

ACE Centre, Ormerod School, Waynflete Road, Headington, Oxford, OX3
8DD
Tel 0865 63508

DOCUMENTATION

No documentation accompanies the disk

DESCRIPTION

Exploring Further is an extension of 'Touch Explorer' and includes some of the features it was felt were needed to provide a more flexible and useful early communication and language development program. While retaining all the best features of 'Touch Explorer' this program allows a child to concatenate words into phrases or sentences and then repeat and listen to the result. It further allows an adult to edit the spoken word so that although the written word still appears correctly spelt, the speech synthesiser will give the best available rendition of the word.

COMMENTS

The inclusion of the important extra facilities in this program gives recognition to an aspect of the original program that was not perhaps originally intended: that is the usefulness of a simple whole-word concept keyboard program in initiating and enhancing early communication in non-speaking or brain damaged children. Although such a program has existed for some time on an Apple Computer, to see it crystallise in a program for the BBC Computer is most welcome.

PRICE GUIDE

This program is freely copiable and can be obtained from the ACE Centre for £2.50 + 1 formatted disk and a S.A.E. (32p) measuring 32cms x 23cms.



SUMMARY

Free Writer can be used as both a simple communicator and an early whole-word word processor. It only accepts words from a Concept Keyboard and these can be spoken out through a speech synthesiser.

HARDWARE

BBC B, B+, Master 128

INPUT

Concept Keyboard

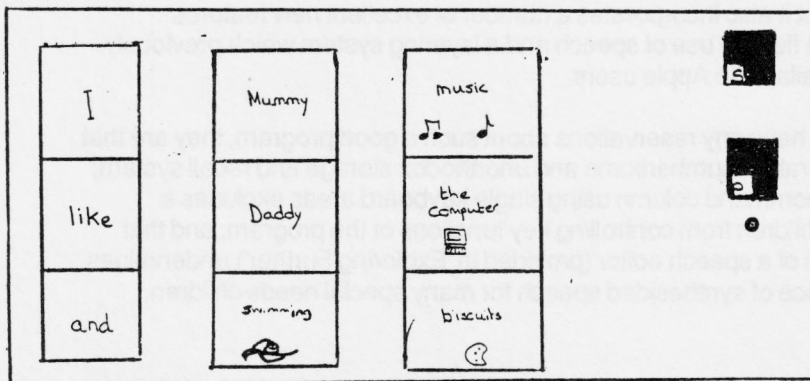
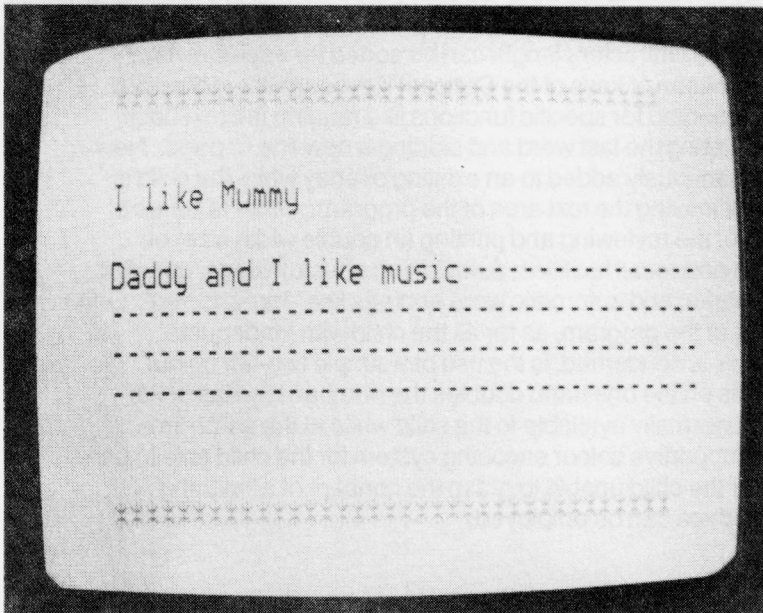
OUTPUT

Screen

Printer

Disk

Text to speech synthesisers like Votrax or Mimic



SUPPLIER

Chris Hopkins, 156 Reading Road, Woodley, Reading, Berks RG5 3AA

DOCUMENTATION

Adequate documentation accompanies the disk.

DESCRIPTION

In the introduction to the documentation the author of 'Free Writer' describes the program as a 'program which allows children to become writers without the difficulties imposed by handwriting and the correct spelling of key words'. So why should it be included in a software survey pertinent to children with severe learning difficulties? Well, what the introduction, strangely enough, fails to mention is the intelligent and flexible way the program manipulates speech synthesis, providing an extremely supportive reinforcement to the written word. Indeed it is this feature which makes it so useful to the child with severe communication difficulties and which distinguishes it from the plethora of whole-word word processors available these days for Concept Keyboard.

The program invites the child to create sentences by pressing symbols, pictures or words on an overlay. These then appear on the screen and are spoken out word by word. Overlays can be easily created and any number of keyboard areas can be configured to a specific word or phrase. Up to 240 words or phrases of 15 characters length can be sorted for each overlay. Only the fifth hand column of keys of the Concept Keyboard are locked out because they are reserved for specific functions like reading the text back, changing layers, deleting the last word and starting a new line or page. New words can be spontaneously added to an existing overlay while the child is working and without leaving the text area of the program. Other features of the program include: the reviewing and printing (in double width size) of pages; text storage and recall facilities; autoshifting after full-stops, question and exclamation marks; and automatic word endings like '-ing' and '-ed'. One of the best features of the program, as far as the child with inadequate communication skills is concerned, is the use of a simple two-tier colour coding system. This on the one hand doubles the number of areas of the Concept Keyboard normally available to the child while at the same time offering a simple, supportive colour encoding system for the child able to use such a system. For the child unable to grasp the concept of a 'layering' system, a single surface can be employed.

COMMENTS

Free Writer is essentially a hybrid of 'Prompt 3' and 'Exploring Further' (see page 17) but it also incorporates a number of excellent new features including the flexible use of speech and a layering system which previously was only available to Apple users.

If one has to have any reservations about such a good program, they are that it employs a rather cumbersome and unorthodox storage and recall system; that a fixed command column using single keyboard areas excludes a number of children from controlling key functions of the program; and that the omission of a speech editor (provided in 'Exploring Further') undervalues the importance of synthesised speech for many special needs children.

PRICE GUIDE

£10.00

SUMMARY

This is an adventure game to stimulate language development in young physically handicapped children and offers a variety of inputs including single and double switches.

HARDWARE

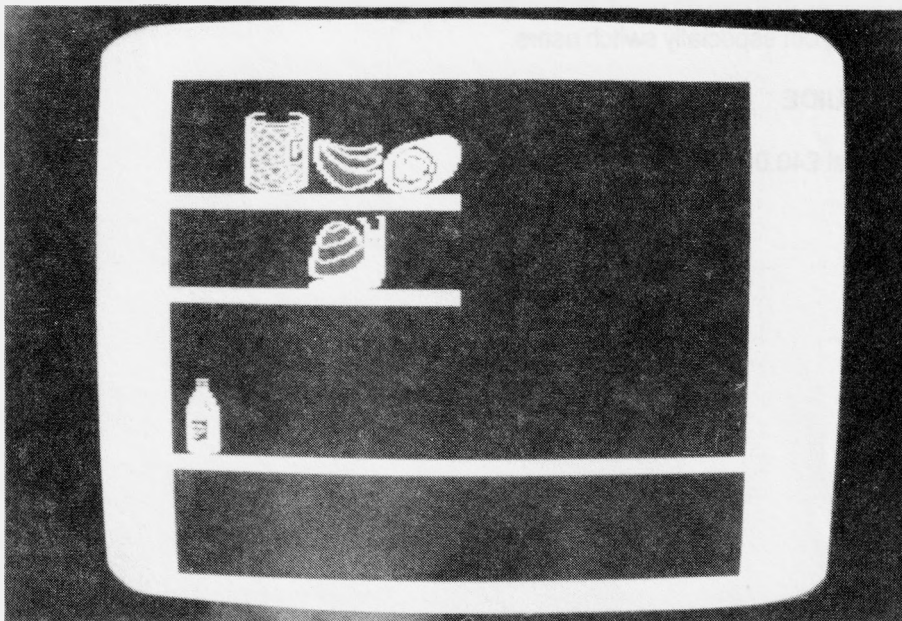
BBC B, BBC+, Master 128

INPUT

Analogue port switches
User port switches
Concept Keyboard
Micromike

OUTPUT

Screen



SUPPLIER


WIDGIT Software Ltd, 1 The Ryde, Hatfield, Herts AL9 5DQ
Tel 07072 64780

DOCUMENTATION

A comprehensive booklet is provided.

DESCRIPTION

This suite of programs consists of six disks all developing the theme of 'a day out'. The child first decides where to go, then what to wear and what to take. After the journey, there are two different games at each location. Games for



each destination are different. Finally there is the journey home. Each game has three levels of difficulty allowing the child to work through graded tasks. These levels have been designed approximately for 3-4 year olds, 4-5 year olds and 5-6 year olds.

Each disk requires setting up before use. Amongst other things, a scanning delay can be varied and a test is provided so any changes can be made before using the program. Sound volume too can be varied. Various keys on the keyboard provide the teacher or therapist with a means of altering the volume, the speed of the cursor as well as returning to the main menu whilst the child is using the program.

Once the child has chosen a location and the appropriate clothes and items to take with them, the journey takes place through a series of mazes. Locations include the shops, the beach, a party and the park.

COMMENTS

This is a lovely suite of programs offering enormous scope for language development, not only to individual children but in general classroom activities. The number of different levels within each game and the variety of input devices that can be used, makes these programs particularly useful for all children, but especially switch users.

PRICE GUIDE

Six disks at £40.00

MICREX TOY CONTROLLER

SUMMARY

The Micrex toy controller is intended to give the teacher or parent of profoundly mentally handicapped children the possibility of extending the educational value of switch-and-toy systems.



HARDWARE

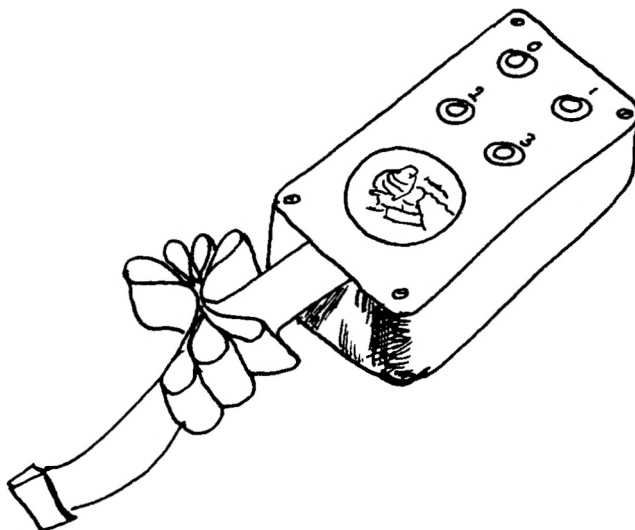
BBC B, B+, Master 128
Toy controller interface box

INPUT

Up to four switches with 1/4" jack plugs
The interface box connects via the user port

OUTPUT

Open ended depending on the software used



SUPPLIER

MICREX, 7 laverock LEA Portchester, Hants PO16 8DA

Toys for the Handicapped, Tube Plastics Ltd, Severn Road, Stourport-on-Severn, Worcester DY13 9EX
TEL 02993 4516 X11

Q.E.D LTD, 1 Prince Alfred Street, Gosport, Hants

DOCUMENTATION

Instructions are available

DESCRIPTION

The Micrex Toy controller can be used as a switch training device or simply as an interface for any switch software which uses the user port on the BBC. It should be pointed out that modifications do sometimes have to be made to some toys in order to accommodate the 1/4" jack on the toy controller. Most manufacturers of toys for the handicapped will do this on request.

SOFTWARE

The toy controller is supplied with some excellent software which enables the teacher to create a real and varied learning environment in which a child can be taught how to control a switch while playing with an electronic toy. Having acquired the skill of controlling a switch the child can proceed to enjoy and manipulate a whole range of early learning software especially designed for switch users. Ultimately a child can reach the stage where transfer to a Concept Keyboard or more elaborate switch programs becomes possible.

More specifically the disk which accompanies the Micrex toy controller has five programs. 'TOYREP' allows the teacher to demand any number of switch operations to produce a timed response from a battery toy. By contrast 'TOYHOLD' demands continuous pressure on the switch before activating the reward. The third program, M.A.1 expects the child to concentrate on the screen where a simple visual prompt is shown. A time limit can be set to increase the child's concentration and reaction time. Programs M.A.2 and M.A.3 concentrate on teaching the child left and right discrimination, the first providing heavy directional clues which are omitted in the second.

COMMENTS

There are now a number of interface boxes available but the Micrex remains the only one which offers a suite of programs appropriate for use with profoundly handicapped children. This software is certainly not designed to be used over long periods of time and should therefore be used sparingly and in conjunction with other simple switch programs like the 'Compact System' and 'Special Needs' Programs.

PRICE

£24.95	Micrex Toy Controller from Micrex themselves
£22.95	As above but without the toy cable and 1/4" jack plug
£27.00	Micrex Toy Controller from Q.E.D.
£20.50	Micrex Toy Controller without the toy cable and 1/4" jack plug from Toys for the Handicapped

**SUMMARY**

Micromate is a system of switches with some dedicated software specifically designed for the profoundly handicapped children.

HARDWARE

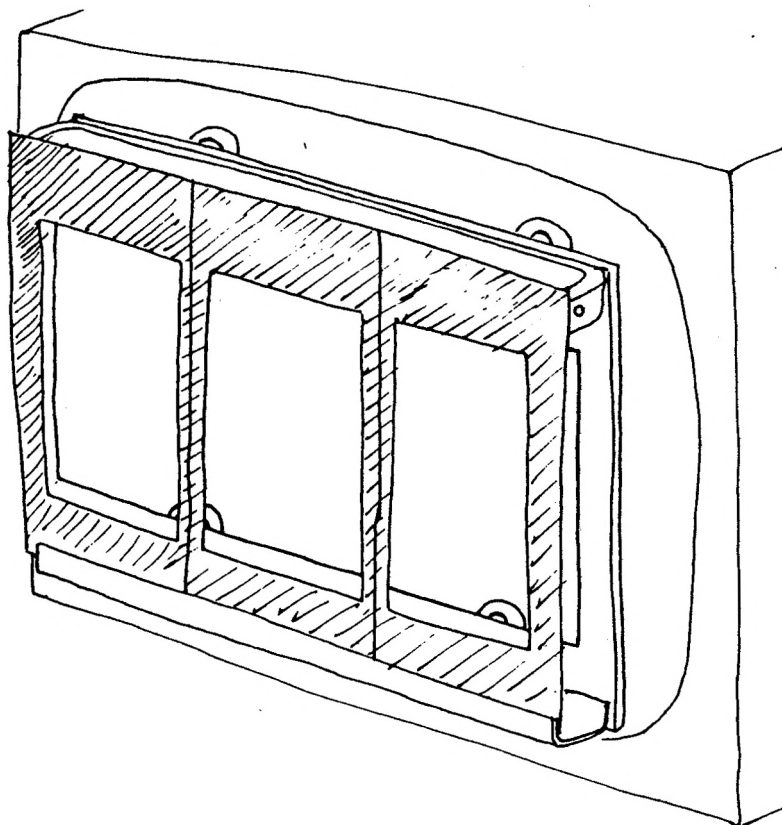
BBC B, Master 128

INPUT

Micromate Touch Screen switches
3-knob Switch Box which connects via the user port
Microvitec Touchtec 501 Screen

OUTPUT

Screen only when using Micromate software. Otherwise open ended depending on the software.

**SUPPLIER**

Toys for the Handicapped, Tube Plastics Ltd, Severn Road, Stourport-on-Severn, Worcestershire DY13 9EX
Tel: 02993 4516 x11

DOCUMENTATION

Instructions are included.

DESCRIPTION

Micromate consists of either a transparent lever switch which is stuck to the screen with rubber suction pads, a wooden box with three knob switches or the Microvitec Touch Screen. The first and last are both interesting and versatile in that they can be rigged flexibly to accommodate one, two or three switch inputs depending on the software being used. However, a child has to be able to reach the touch screens and unless the monitor can be mounted horizontally, this may not be suitable for some severely handicapped children. There is also the additional problem in that the 'touch screen' lever switches obscure approximately a third of the monitor screen when mounted which can cause visual problems. In many ways the three-way knob switch offers a more satisfactory input device. It is very robust and nicely finished with colourful knobs and very positive switches. But like the touch screen it is not cheap.

SOFTWARE

Dedicated software for the Micromate is available but has to be purchased separately and is rather expensive for what it is. For example one package of four small programs costs £30.00. This means that to set up the Micromate Touch Screen system with one disk of software would cost over a hundred pounds. None of the software is content free and by comparison with some of the free software available from other sources, it is inadequate.

'Performance contoured programs' such as Micromate have been specifically developed to meet concepts, and objects are included in a one dimensional mode as it was felt that this aids those with severe learning difficulties when attempting to understand these concepts.

In mitigation of Micromate it must be said that both the touch screen and box switches can be very effectively used with other software such as the 'Compact System', 'Colour Scan', the 'Special Needs' programs and other free or cheap software requiring standard input from the user port.

COMMENTS

In conclusion it must be said that although the hardware is good and versatile, the software is less impressive and somewhat overpriced.

PRICE

£69.50	Micromate Touch Screen
£29.50	Three-way switch box
£10.00	Interface
£15.00	Starter Pack
£30.00	Disk 1
£30.00	Disk 2
£30.00	Disk 3

Specify whether for the Micromate for Microvitec Touch Screens



SUMMARY

Micromike is intended to stimulate vocalisation and offer opportunities for younger or less able children to experience any of a number of simple cause and effect programs.

HARDWARE

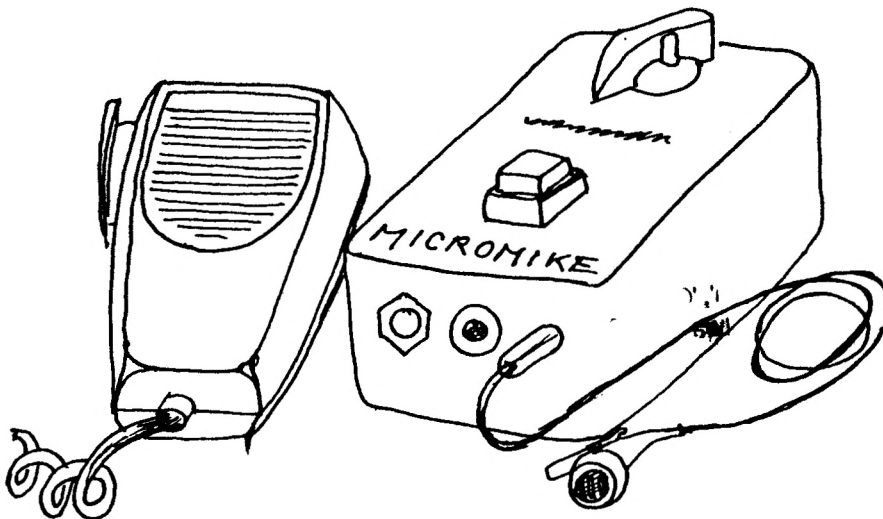
BBC B, B+, Master 128

INPUT

Hand held CB microphone
Desk mounted microphone
Both connect via the analogue

OUTPUT

Open ended depending on the software



SUPPLIER

Magpie System, 45 Runcorn Road, Moore, Warrington, WA4 6TX
TEL 0925 74707

DOCUMENTATION

Limited documentation is provided.

DESCRIPTION

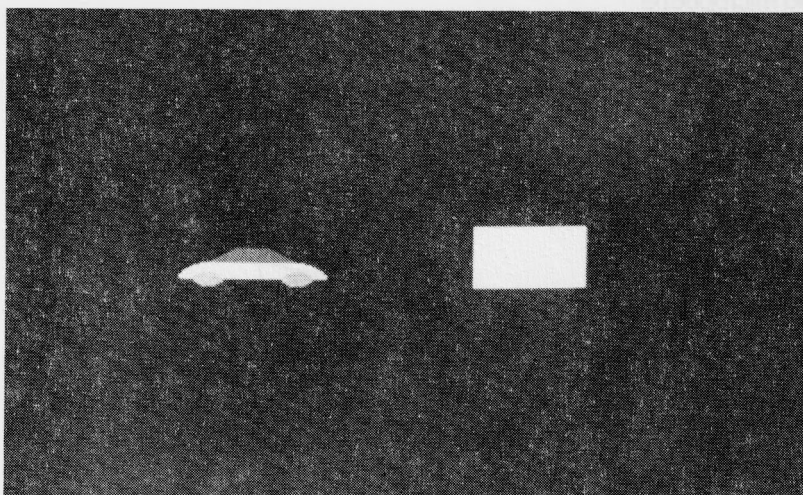
Micromike consists of two different types of units based on the CB radio microphones. One is hand held with a switch mounted on the side of the microphone; the other is desk-top mounted with the option of a tiny clip-on microphone that can be plugged in for remote use, a thumb press switch on a jack plug and variable sound controller to adjust to the level of a child's

voice output. They are not voice recognition units and are not suitable on the whole for use as general purpose sound activated switches.

SOFTWARE

A proliferation of software has been produced for the Micromike over the past two years. Much of it is suitable for use with profoundly handicapped children and/or children with poor visual acuity. Some of these programs are described below.

1. Micromike Software



Micromike Software itself is accompanied by ten programs of varying content and degrees of difficulty. They range from a simple program that parks a car in a garage and a train that puffs its way across the screen through to more complicated games which invite the player to steer a boat or motorbike through a set of obstacles. Some of the programs require the child to vocalise at precisely the right moment in order to play a game properly and this is very useful for encouraging better voice control.

2. Research Centre for the Education of the Visually Handicapped Software

The Centre has modified five of the original Micromike programs so that the foreground and background colours, speed, sound threshold and volume can all be adjusted by the teacher to suit a child's individual needs. This is very useful indeed but only five of the ten programs have so far been modified and some of these still run at speeds beyond the dexterity and ability of many children. Although strictly speaking they have been modified for the visually impaired child, they are very useful for a much larger range of children.

The Centre has also written six programs for the visually handicapped which simply change and move colours on a screen when sounds of a sufficient volume are made into the Micromike. They are intended to provide a visual stimulus and reward to the child's attempts at vocalisation. As such they can be used effectively with children with severe learning difficulties. As with all the Centre's programs, an element of flexibility is built into them which allows the teacher to control the background and the foreground colours as well as the size of the shapes being displayed.

3. Compact System

Amongst the large collection of Derek Harrison's 'Compact System' programs (described on page 15) there are a number which operate very effectively with the Micromike. They require single switch operation and use vocalisation into the microphone to generate patterns, colours, pictures and animations on the screen. As with other Micromike programs they aim to encourage a child's vocalisation and establish an understanding of cause and effect. Although any sound will activate the Micromike, it is useful for some children to attempt to make the appropriate contextual word; for example, 'swim' to make a man swim. Of the 'Compact System' programs some thirty to forty will work with the Micromike. Facilities for choosing colour are included.

4. Special Needs Programs

Micromike can also be used with most of Alan Nixon's 'Special Needs' single switch programs (described in greater detail on page 39). These provide the child with a number of different early learning programs including 'colour snap', 'odd one out', matching and building pictures.

COMMENTS

There is no doubt that the Micromike already offers great possibilities both for the child who requires a simple input device and the child who needs encouragement to vocalise or to acquire controlled vocalisation. The facility for adjusting the sound threshold to meet the child's needs is particularly useful. However, it should be remembered that in the case of the hand held Micromike this is only available via the software and not all the software for the Micromike offers this adjustment.

PRICE GUIDE

£27.00 Hand held CB Micromike

£32.00 Desk-top Micromike including the remote microphone.



SUMMARY

This is a touch sensitive screen that fits on to a 14" monitor and like the Cheyne Scribbler offers a variety of dedicated software.

HARDWARE

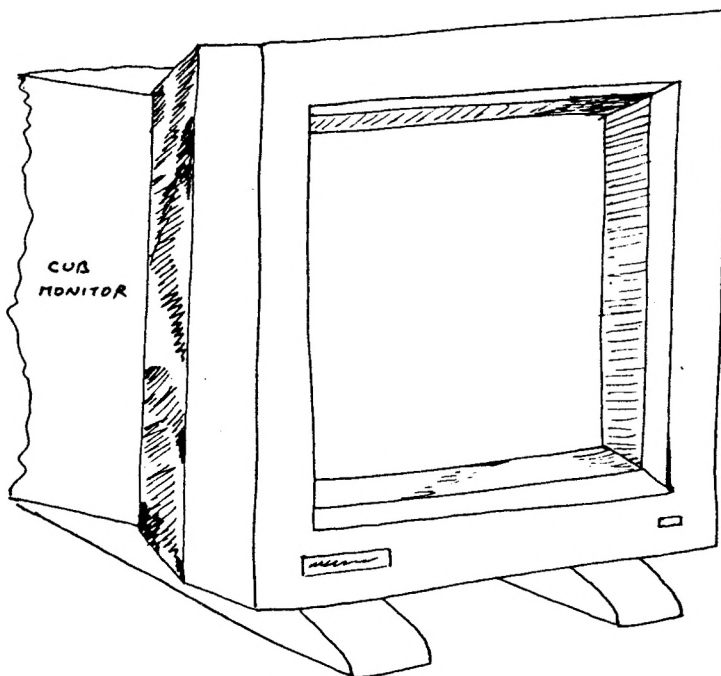
BBC Model B, B+, Master 128
RML 480Z. Nimbus
Spectrum (with interface 1)

INPUT

Touchtec 501 touch sensitive screen
Connects via the RS232 (RS432 on the BBC) serial port

OUTPUT

Screen

**SUPPLIER**

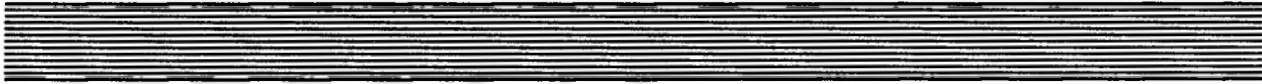
Microvitec PLC, Futures Way, Bolling Road, Bradford, West Yorkshire BD4
7TU
Tel: 0274 390011/726500

DOCUMENTATION

A comprehensive operator's manual is provided.

DESCRIPTION

This is a very similar touch sensitive screen to the 'Cheyne Scribbler' from which it evolved. It is different, however, from the 'Cheyne Scribbler', in that



it is designed to match physically and aesthetically a 14" Microvitec Cub Monitor. It is not easily detachable but will fit other 14" monitors. It is both accurate and easy to use, responding to the user when the screen is touched. One problem with all touch sensitive screens is that they will only respond accurately if touched at one single point on the screen. Thus if a child breaks the light beams with part of the wrist or more than one finger, then an unpredictable element creeps into the activity. One solution for some children is to use a pencil for pointing or to mount the screen horizontally in order to improve positioning and comfort. Neither of these are ideal solutions, however.

SOFTWARE

The screen comes complete with a demonstration disk of possible applications. These, it should be stressed, have a rather limited educational range and value especially for the child with special needs. The best of the programs are 'Music' and 'Artist'. 'Music' allows notes to be directly played or alternatively stored, edited and saved. It is therefore quite a sophisticated program but can still be used quite simply. 'Artist' is a bold finger painting program which offers a good range of bright colours. Pictures may be saved and loaded but not printed. Accurate and detailed painting is not possible, however, with this program. The package also contains utility programs, for existing programs to be modified or new ones to be written.

A variety of programs have been written for children with special needs at the Research Centre for the Education of the Visually Impaired (RCEVH) at Birmingham University. These consist of cause and effect, tracking and other early cognitive exercises suitable for profoundly handicapped children. They also provide material useful in the teaching and testing of visual memory, matching and discrimination of basic geometric shapes, colours and sizes. The programs are very reliable and offer simple colourful and tuneful rewards although the content may be rather too abstract for use with less able children.

In addition Janet Larcher's 'Early Fingers' programs (see page 12) for a full description) have now been adapted for the Microvitec screen as well as the Cheyne Scribbler. These are available through the Blue File distribution system.

COMMENTS

The Microvitec Touch Screen is a useful tool for focusing children's attention on to the screen especially when used with the RCEVH software. For its more sophisticated uses children would require good fine motor control and a higher conceptual understanding. Indeed it is a shame that such an impressive device which has now been around for some two years has so little high quality software to accompany it.

PRICE GUIDE

£210.00

SUMMARY

These two Concept Keyboard programs are designed to provide short-term visual memory tasks and number recognition.

HARDWARE

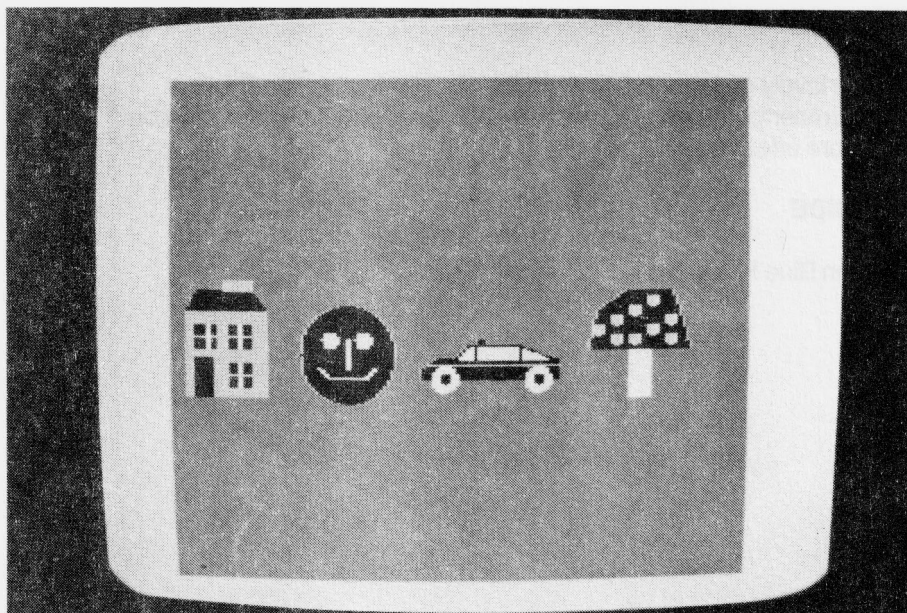
BBC B, B+, Master 128

INPUT

Concept Keyboard

OUTPUT

Screen
Acorn Speech Chip for Number Touch



SUPPLIER

Contact your regional SEMERC or ACE for a list of LEA distribution schools.

DOCUMENTATION

The package provides the necessary basic information

DESCRIPTION

Two programs are provided, one for number recognition and the other for picture matching and visual memory tasks.

'Numbertouch' consists of two games. After five houses have been drawn on the screen with their corresponding numbers, a puff of smoke obscures one of the numbers and the child has then to press the appropriate place on

the Concept Keyboard. There is no response for an incorrect press. At this point the child is simply matching the place of the smoke on the screen to an area of the Concept Keyboard. In the second game, the numbers are placed in different positions on the Concept Keyboard, so that the child is required to count the number of houses up to the one with the smoke and then be able to match this to a number on the Concept Keyboard.

'Picture' enables the child to make pictures appear on the screen by pressing different areas of the Concept Keyboard. The 'Teach' programs are graded to increase the amount of information on the screen gradually. The 'Games' programs then draw one or two rows of pictures on the screen. A picture subsequently disappears and the child has to redraw the picture by pressing the correct area of the Concept Keyboard. The one disadvantage here is that the pictures are not randomly distributed on the screen, but are in the equivalent positions as to the Concept Keyboard. Therefore, a child may simply be achieving success by remembering the positions of the pictures rather than the picture itself.

COMMENTS

Despite the lovely graphics in 'Picture', the use of this program is rather limited. 'Numbertouch' on the other hand has greater flexibility and so could be used more effectively.

PRICE GUIDE

Available on Blue File at cost.

SUMMARY

This is a program for early switch users which allows simple pictures to be drawn or matched.

HARDWARE

BBC B, B+, Master 128

INPUT

Star Concept Keyboard

Cheshire Keyboard

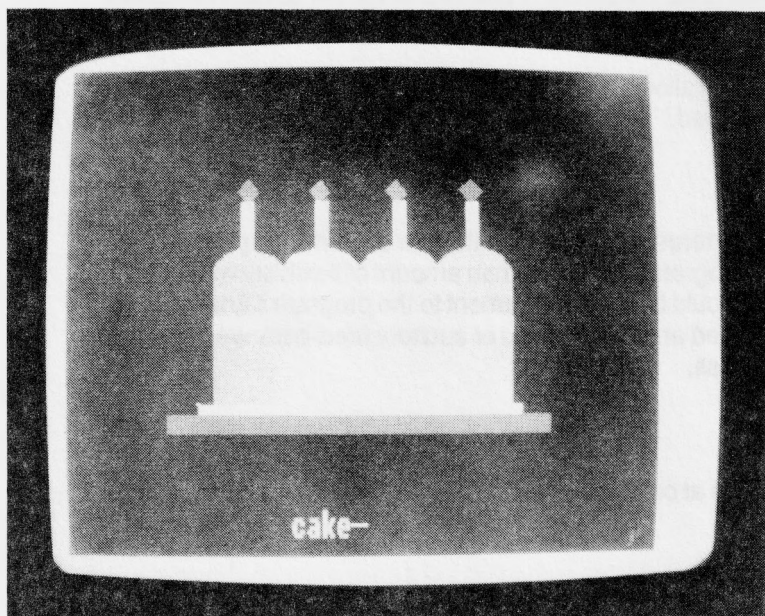
One or two switches connected to the Micrex Toy Control Interface

OUTPUT

Screen

Text to speech synthesiser such as Votrax or Mimic

Printer



SUPPLIER


Contact your regional SEMERC or ACE for a list of LEA distribution schools.

DOCUMENTATION

Comprehensive documentation is provided.

DESCRIPTION

'Picture Play' illustrates objects from the single word level of the Derbyshire Language Scheme. Two programs are available on the disk, 'Picture Matching' and 'Further Use'.



The pictures in 'Picture Matching' can be displayed in large or small format and in a variety of displays, for example, full colour, coloured outline, black and white outline or a random selection. The type of reward can also be selected in the form of flashing objects, pictures or toy play. Both the length of the reward and the sound level are variable.

'Picture Matching' allows the teacher to select one or two pictures to be matched from a selection of thirty-six on the disk. The teacher can also decide which side of the keyboard or which switch the picture is on. A record of the child's progress is kept and can be viewed and printed if desired.

If a speech synthesiser is attached the name of the picture is produced as it appears on the screen. To achieve a more accurate pronunciation, the pictures can be renamed or phonetically spelt.

'Further Use' offers three options. The first, 'Looking at a Picture' will display the chosen picture on the screen and a single line of double height text can be written in below it. This can then be printed. The second option, 'Building a Picture', enables the user to build a picture in several with repeated presses of a switch. When the picture is finished a 'ping' is produced. The third option available is one to change the colours of objects within a picture.

Finally a utilities option allows the teacher to delete and save pictures that children have completed.

COMMENTS

This is a useful and interesting program with clear colourful graphics for early switch users. The program allows a certain amount of flexibility within its fixed contents format. It would be an improvement to the program if analogue port switches could be used and if some kind of auditory feed-back were available after each switch press.

PRICE GUIDE

Available on Blue File at cost.

SUMMARY

Podd is an amusing character who will carry out a wide variety of actions which a child discovers by a process of inspired guesses.

HARDWARE

BBC B, B+, Master 128

INPUT

Keyboard

OUTPUT

Screen

**SUPPLIER**


ESM Software, Duke Street, Wisbech, Cambs, PE13 2AE
Tel: 0945 634441

DOCUMENTATION

The documentation is brief but comprehensive

DESCRIPTION

Podd is a likable character who will perform many different actions on the screen which the child has to discover by trial and error. Quite deliberately, no clues are given so that a strong element of exploration and anticipation is inherent to the program. Although this program only accepts entry from the keyboard and the ability to spell correctly, it is worthwhile including here as it can be used to stimulate early language by a child telling his teacher what actions Podd might be able to carry out. If a child has sufficient physical ability, then they could well press the return key to actually make Podd



perform the action. Again children with sufficient fine motor control but who are not able to write independently could use the program by copying words they have thought of.

There are two games on the disk. In the first Podd performs single actions. In the second, he performs up to five actions in sequence.

COMMENTS

This is a program which is great fun for children to use and which has its place when selecting language software for some children with severe learning difficulty.

PRICE GUIDE

£9.95

SINGLE SWITCH TRAINER DISK

SUMMARY

This disk consists of a variety of single switch games which can be used to train children in the control of their switches.

HARDWARE

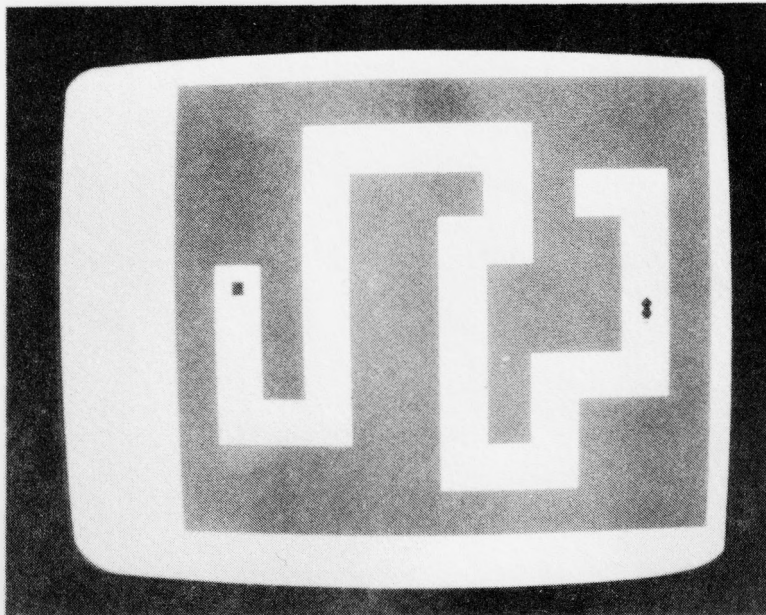
BBC B, B+, Master 128

INPUT

One switch via analogue or user port
Concept Keyboard
Micromike
Space bar

OUTPUT

Screen
Printer
Any toy reward



SUPPLIER

J S Rees, The Lancasterian Project, Department of Sciences Education,
Manchester Polytechnic, 799 Wilmslow Road, Didsbury, Manchester M20
8RR

DOCUMENTATION

A single sheet of instructions accompanies the disk.

DESCRIPTION

Two programs are included on this disk. The first contains a variety of single switch introductory programs. These include a number of cause and effect exercises using shapes, patterns and sound to attract the child's attention



and reward him with some toy play.

The second, 'Wiper' is intended as a trainer of four-directional scanning. It teaches the switch user to control a flashing cursor which moves around the cursor in a clockwise direction. The square cursor is approximately one inch in size and the speed of the arrow can be varied via the function keys. This is particularly useful because it means the speed can be altered while the child is using the program. When the switch is pressed, the cursor moves and part of a picture is revealed. There are three pictures to choose from, a house, the seaside or three teddies. The picture can be printed at any time by pressing another function key.

COMMENTS

The second program, 'Wiper', is a useful introductory single switch program. However it does take a long time and considerable skill to uncover an entire picture and this may well frustrate a number of children.

PRICE GUIDE

£9.00

SUMMARY

This consists of two disks, the first for single switch users and the second for keyboard users.

HARDWARE

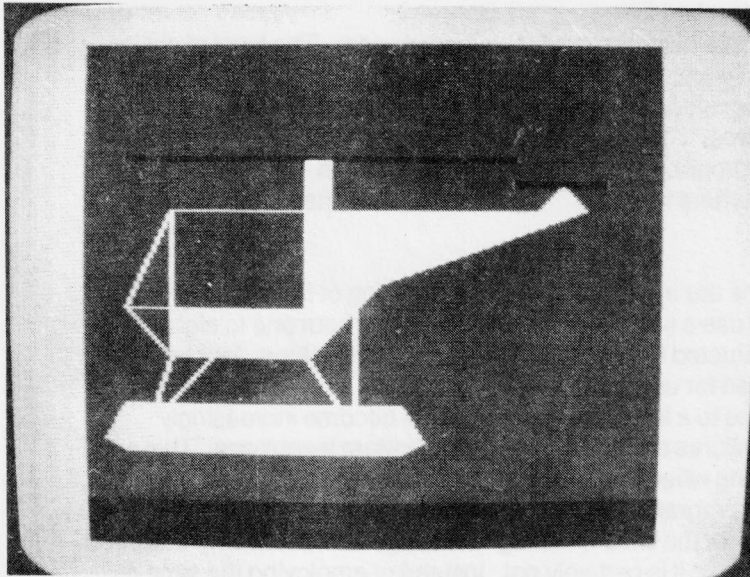
BBC B, B+, Master 128

INPUT

Single switch via user port
Single switch via analogue port
Micromike
Keyboard

OUTPUT

Screen
Disk



SUPPLIER

Alan Nixon, 5 Perry Road, Bangor, Co Down, N Ireland
Tel 0247 456136

DOCUMENTATION

Comprehensive documentation can be read from the screen or sent to a printer.

DESCRIPTION

Until recently the 'Special Needs' Programs from Alan Nixon were all on one disk. They have now been extended and separated into two disks.

The first disk contains ten programs covering various areas of special needs and early learning. All take single switch input only, including, in most of the programs, the use of the space bar or Micromike as an input switch. Two of the most interesting programs are 'Build' and 'Switch'. 'Build' allows pictures to be built up on the screen in response to the operation of the switch. Each response adds an element to the picture and finally animates it. There are five pictures to choose from. This is a stimulating and rewarding program which approaches the concept of cause and effect very imaginatively.

'Switch' is a switch training program which encourages children to learn to control a single switch consistently. With it either switch pushing or switch holding can be trained. The number of presses or the length of switch hold can be defined and controlled by the teacher or therapist, as can the choice and length of reward consisting of seven animated pictures.

The rest of the programs on this first disk consist of 'Snap', 'Odd-one-out' and 'Matching' programs of varying degrees of difficulty. One of them, 'Odd/one' is a game which displays items in groups of four, of which one is the odd-one-out. The program allows teachers to design their own lists from the keyboard with the obvious restriction that the lists have to contain characters represented on the computer keyboard.

The second disk contains programs for keyboard users. The level of ability required of children varies considerably. For example a reading age of between five and seven years is just one of a number of prerequisites for some of the programs. They range from a keyboard familiarisation game through to a maze program and an adventure-type game. Some of the programs allow teachers to add information or ideas of their own to the programs.

The maze programs are amongst the more interesting of these. Here children can either use a set of existing mazes, grade from one to eight or have a maze constructed for them personally. The arrow keys, four switches or a joystick modified for use with the user port can be used to guide a little man through a maze to a target area. The mazes become increasingly difficult and three failures drops you back to the bottom level maze. This can be a bit disheartening when you've reached level seven! 'M/Mazer' and 'Mazer' are the two programs which enable a teacher to create and run a personalised maze for the child. Although creating the maze is very easy and swift, running and using it is certainly not. Instead of employing the simple method of using the arrow keys as in the eight fixed mazes, the child must press three keys, the arrow key, the return key and the space bar for every movement through the maze! For many children this is just too bewildering.

COMMENTS

The 'Special Needs' Programs undoubtedly contain some good ideas and as a result adds usefully to the growing bank of software available for children with severe learning difficulties. If a general criticism can be levelled against them, it is that they try to cover too great an activity range and that whereas some programs are suitable for profoundly handicapped children, others are not. This makes it extremely difficult to select and gauge a program for a particular child's need.

PRICE

£9.00 Both keyboard and single switch disks.

£5.00 To update your old 'Special Care' programs.

**SUMMARY**

This is a switch operated, computer training and picture matching program.

HARDWARE

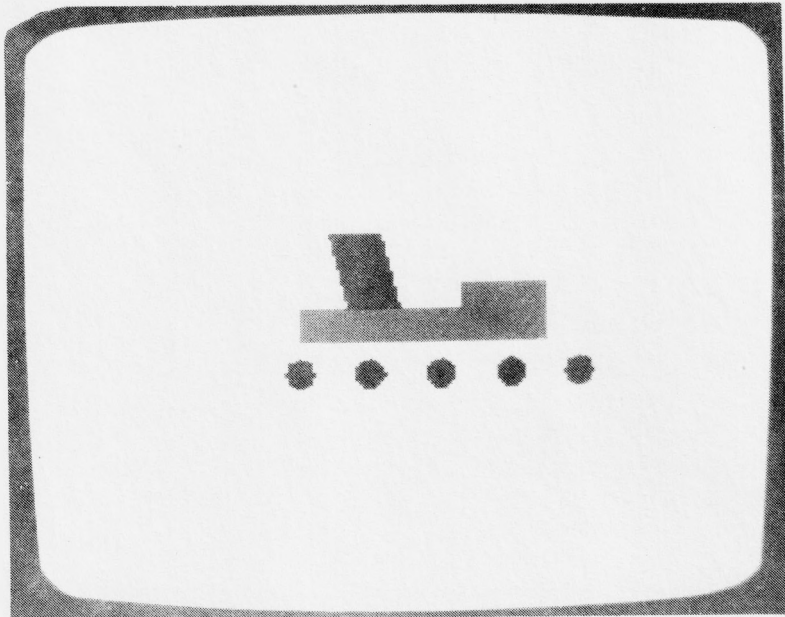
BBC B, B+, Master 128

INPUT

Keyboard
Analogue or user port switches

OUTPUT

Screen

**SUPPLIER**

Brilliant Computing, PO Box 142, Bradford BD3 0JN

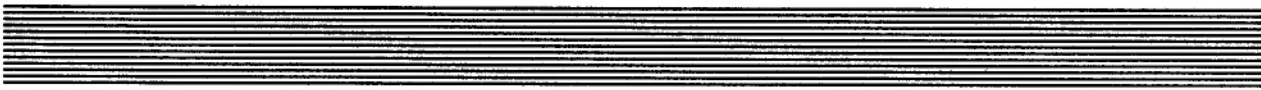
DOCUMENTATION

A brief, but comprehensive manual accompanies the disk.

DESCRIPTION

This program is part of a larger suite of programs produced by Brilliant Computing. 'Switch On' is divided into two sections, computer training and picture matching. In both programs, brightly coloured pictures are drawn on the screen and on completion of the picture a visual and auditory reward is given.

The computer training program allows the picture to be built in a number of steps. Cursors at the bottom of the screen indicate to the user when to press the switch or, if using two switches, which switch to press.



The picture matching program draws two small pictures on the right and left of the screen. A larger picture is drawn in the middle. The user has to press the switch corresponding to the side of the screen that contains the small picture in order to match the larger one in the middle.

Another piece of software in the suite worth considering is 'Everyday Signs' which provides the older child with a new way of learning to recognise social signs. 'First Steps' is a useful either for as long as a switch is pressed or for a preset length of time.

COMMENTS

These cause and effect training programs are very useful in assessing the level of response and reaction in a wide variety of children. The range and method of input is a particularly strong feature of the programs. For example, the fact that the child has to stop, look and switch again is an important developmental stage in switch control.

PRICE GUIDE

£9.50 each



SUMMARY

This is a program which enables the creation of two or three dimensional stories, pictures and communication 'boards' using both the displayed and spoken word as output.

HARDWARE

BBC B, B+, Master 128

INPUT

Concept Keyboard

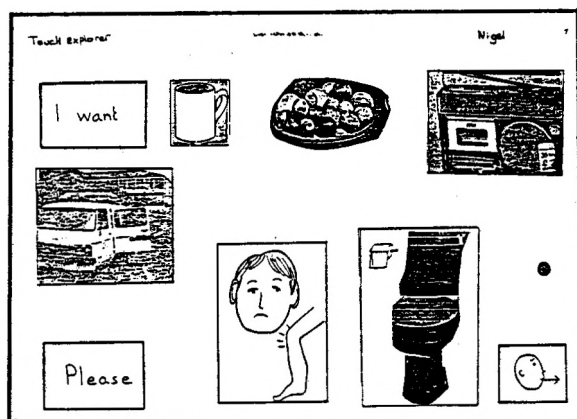
OUTPUT

Screen

Printer

Disk

Text to speech synthesisers like Votrax or Mimic



SUPPLIER

Contact your regional SEMERC or ACE for a list of LEA distribution schools.

DOCUMENTATION

A brief 5 page manual accompanies the disk.

DESCRIPTION

At one level this program can be used to encourage speech and single object concepts by matching real objects, pictures, symbols or single words to the displayed or spoken word. The program works with a Concept Keyboard for which overlays can be designed and then programmed.

The use of a text-to-speech synthesiser is an optional, although powerful accessory. Words, phrases or whole sentences can be stored as separate messages and then programmed to match as many or as few key presses on the Concept Keyboard as required by the user. Three examples of such stories are resident on the master disk although there are no overlays to accompany them.

Editing of messages is also possible although the procedure for doing this is not at present as friendly as it should be. For instance used keys can only be deleted by inputting spaces where a message once was and the phrase "Message used on all remaining keys" can lead to ambiguities.

A screen display of the Concept Keyboard and a key to the position of each message would instead make the teacher's life much easier. A printout of the message contents is however available. In addition names of overlays can be easily displayed and deleted from a simple catalogue.

COMMENTS

Other useful additions to the development of this program might be the separation of the speech input from the screen text input and the option of printing out a child's adventure, say in double-height characters.

Although developed for a broad band of children this program is very effective with blind or partially sighted children who can explore tactile or large print overlays and benefit from the oral response of the program. It has also been used very effectively with non-speaking and mentally handicapped children to stimulate and enhance communication skills.

A new powerful version of Touch Explorer is underway. This will include: separate speech files, optional key repeat delays and other start-up conditions, a printout, the concatenation of words and phrases into sentences and the use of layers to expand the capacity of the vocabulary stored on an overlay.

PRICE GUIDE

Available on Blue File at cost.

Rompin' Roadster £ 6.00

When the clown's hat is pressed, the car he is sitting in moves

Armatron £5.50

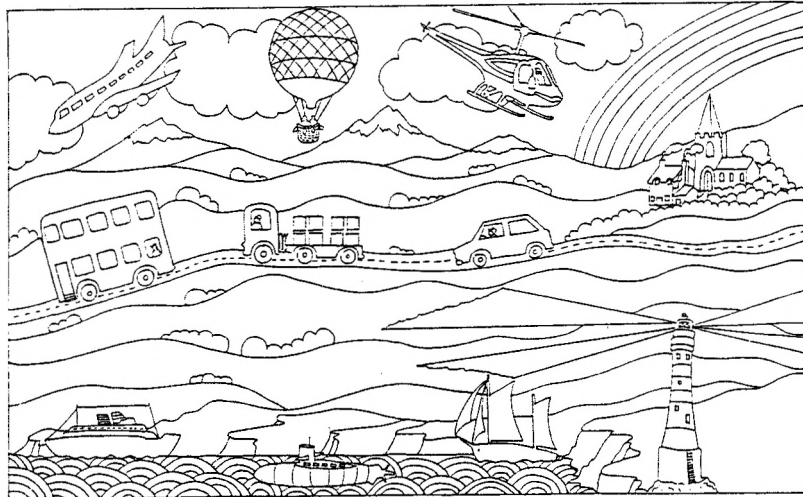
A robot arm which is controlled by two joysticks.

TECH TOYS

SUPPLIER

Tech Toys, Telford Opportunities Centre, Halesfield 14, Telford, Shropshire
TF7 4QR

Adventure Board



This works with the BBC computer (B, B+ or Master 128). By holding the magnetic hedgehog, one of eight environmental sounds or spoken sentences (if a speech synthesiser is attached) can be produced by the computer. It also offers pictures when used with a B+ computer. As yet only one overlay is available.

LECTA DEVICES

SUPPLIER

Lecta Laverton House, Fairford, Glos. GL7 4AB
Tel 0285 712273

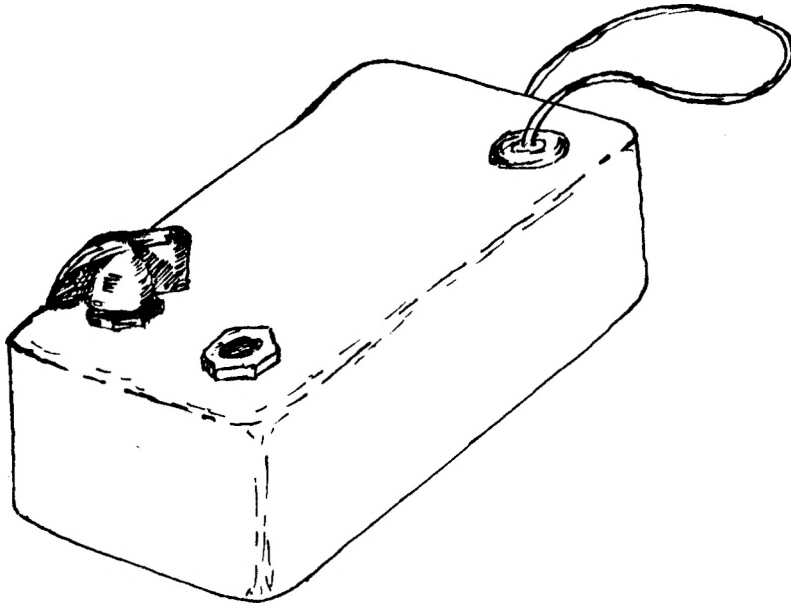
Activity Switches

Light box £ 8.00
Beeper Box £ 9.00
Vibrating box £11.00
Timer box £20.00

These produce either a light, a beep or vibrate when pressed.

In/Out/On/Off Adaptors

Standard £20.00
With Variable time out £23.00



These adaptors are an excellent way of gradually increasing the user's control when using a toy or tape recorder (via a remote socket on the tape recorder).

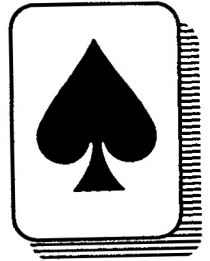
COMMENTS

Adapted toys can be an excellent way of introducing some younger children to the use of switches before attempting to introduce the more abstract and two-dimensional tasks and reward of the computer screen. It also allows a child an effective means of independent control and pleasure within an environment defined by his/her visual or spatial awareness.



SUMMARY

A 'turtle' is a peripheral device for the computer which offers three dimension spatial control and drawing opportunities to children with limited control and ability.



HARDWARE

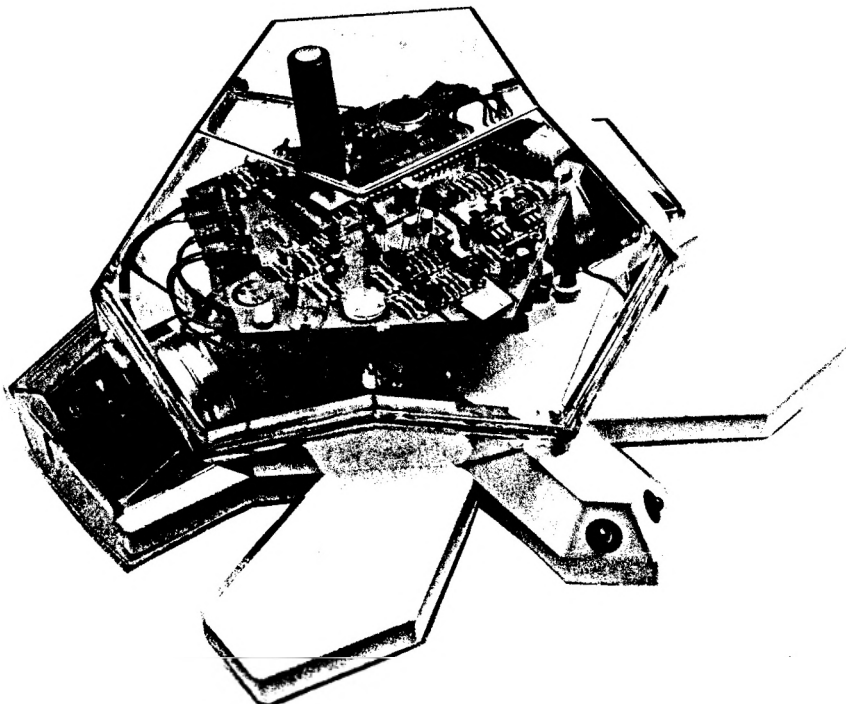
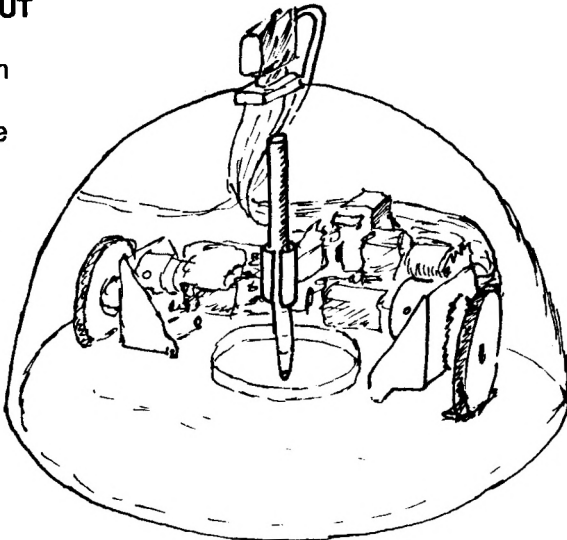
BBC, B+, Master 128
Valiant Turtle
OR Jessop Turtle

INPUT

Star Concept Keyboard
Beebstick plus joystick
Micromike
Single switch

OUTPUT

Screen
Turtle
Picture



SUPPLIER

Jessop Turtle: Jessop Acoustics, Unit 5, 7 Long Street London EC2
Tel 01 739 3232

Valiant Turtle: E J Arnold & Sons Ltd, Lockwood Distribution Centre,
Parkside Lane, Dewsbury Road, Leeds LS11 5TD Tel 0532 710431

'Turtling in Glevum': Contact your regional SEMERC or ACE for a list of LEA
distribution schools.

'Trundle, Nudge, Come and Go': Contact your regional SEMERC or ACE for
a list of LEA distribution schools.

DOCUMENTATION

Clear documentation accompanies both programs discussed below.

DESCRIPTION

Turtle Software

While the Jessop Turtle is cord controlled, the Valiant Turtle is controlled by
infra-red signals from the computer. Both move through 360 degrees and
have penholders which adjust up or down.

Turtling in Glevum

This program is otherwise known as TIG. To use the program the 'Dart'
software from AUCBE and the Concept Keyboard are necessary. Seven
developmental stages are available. The first, designed for children who
have no understanding of number, moves the turtle left, right and forwards in
very large predetermined steps. TIG 2 and 3 teaches simple rotation, TIG 4, 5
and 6 teaches variable forward movements and TIG 7 introduces the concept
of backward movements. All the stages use metric units of measurement.

Trundle

This program uses the Turtle with a joystick. The screen displays large arrows
which reflect the direction of the Turtle. By moving the joystick forwards and
backwards the Turtle moves in those directions, by moving the joystick to
the right and left the Turtle rotates. The fire button on the joystick selects
pen-up or down.

Come and Go

The Turtle is controlled by the Micromike. The length of vocalisation is
selected by the teacher, and the Turtle moves a corresponding distance.
Distance traveled by the Turtle is pre-determined in units of 10cm. While the
program is running, responses and elapsed times are shown on the screen.

Nudge

This program also uses the Micromike. Four arrows are displayed on the
screen. The user vocalises when the arrows is pointing in the desired
direction and the Turtle will continue to move in that direction as long as
voicing is maintained. The second option in this program 'nudges' the Turtle
forwards, backwards, left and right in turn. The user vocalises when the
Turtle is 'nudging' in the desired direction.

COMMENTS

Where originally the Turtle was devised as a control and logic device for the more able child, the existence of specialised software and simple methods of control has brought it within reach of profoundly handicapped children. With it they are able to explore space directionally by knocking down blocks, avoiding obstacles or following a track. They can also draw simple geometric shapes with the Turtle pen without any knowledge of Logo.

PRICE GUIDE

Jessop Turtle: £195.00 plus pp £7.50

Valiant Turtle: £265.00

Turtling in Glevum: Available on Blue file at cost

Trundle, Come and Go, Nudge: Available on Blue File at cost.



SUMMARY

This is a suite of early language programs that can be operated by switches and offers amongst other things synthesised speech as output.

HARDWARE

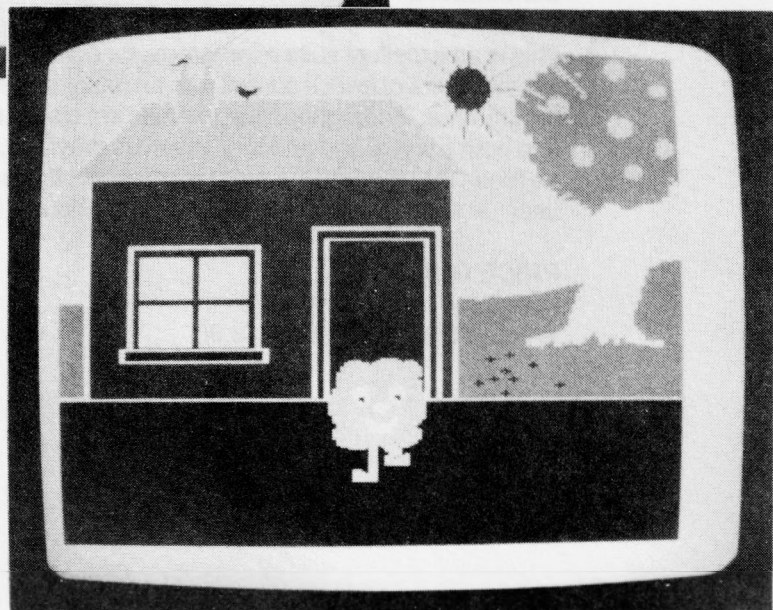
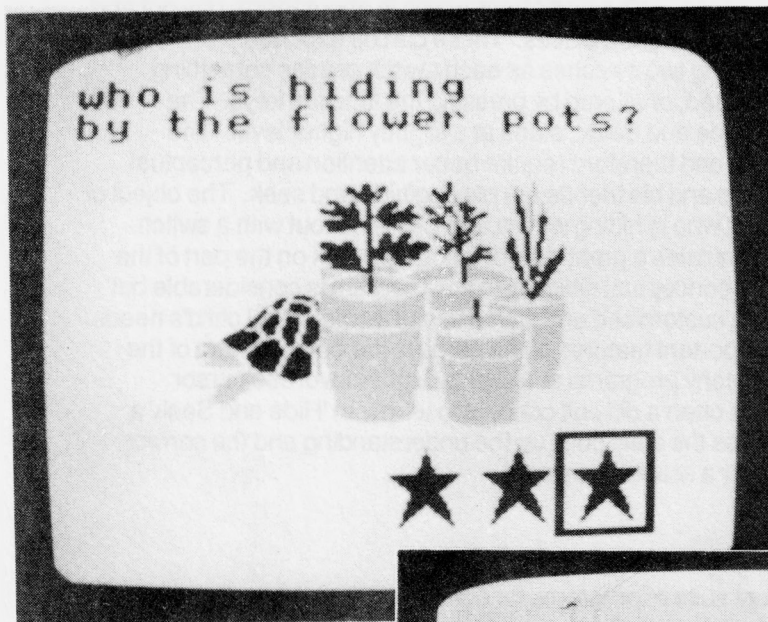
BBC B, B+, Master 128

INPUT

Analogue port switches
User port switches
Concept Keyboard
Micromike
Joystick
Keyboard

OUTPUT

Screen
Text-to speech synthesiser such as Votrax or Mimic
Superior Software Speech Synthesis



SUPPLIER

Widgit Software Ltd, 1 The Ryde, Hatfield, Herts AL 5DQ
Tel 07072 64780

DOCUMENTATION

A comprehensive booklet accompanies the program.

DESCRIPTION

'Where's Blob', as its name suggests, is the sequel to the suite of 'Blob' programs described on page 5 in this document. In effect it aims to take the child from the simplest levels of operation where it trains attention and an understanding of cause and effect through to higher levels of activity which aim to stimulate early language development in the child. As with the 'Blob' programs this suite is carefully designed to introduce the user to the idea of a cursor and to controlled switch pressing. Two suites of programs are available. The first is intended as an introduction to the computer and switches for young children; the second particularly emphasises directional manipulation and selection when using one or two switches. By using the function keys many levels of each game are available to the child.

The first of the programs is 'Out and About' which is about Blob's day out and his visit to a number of different places. These can be explored systematically by using two switches as each switch causes something different to be animated, or altered by pressing the function keys. The second program, 'Hide and Seek', starts at a slightly higher level. The pictures are smaller and therefore require better attention and perceptual skills. This time Blob and his friends are playing hide and seek. The object of the activity is to spot who is hiding where and 'call' them out with a switch. This invites and stimulates a great deal of language work on the part of the child. The range of conceptual difficulty in this program is considerable but the program can be customised and saved to suit an individual child's needs. One of the most important features of the game is the development of the cursor response. Many programs at a slightly higher level use cursor selection and this is often a difficult concept to learn. In 'Hide and Seek' a system of stars helps the child build up the understanding and the correct timing necessary for a scanning system.

COMMENTS

This is an excellent suite of programs for combining the introduction and improvement of switch control with an imaginative and exciting language programme. Throughout the graphics are clear and interesting to the child and both a visual and auditory reward is provided. Where improvement could be made is in the way the program presents its personalisation menus to the user. At the moment this is rather too laborious.

PRICE GUIDE

Where's Blob 1 (2 disks) £13.80

SUMMARY

'Window' is a program in which pictures are gradually revealed or explored through a series of so-called 'windows'.

HARDWARE

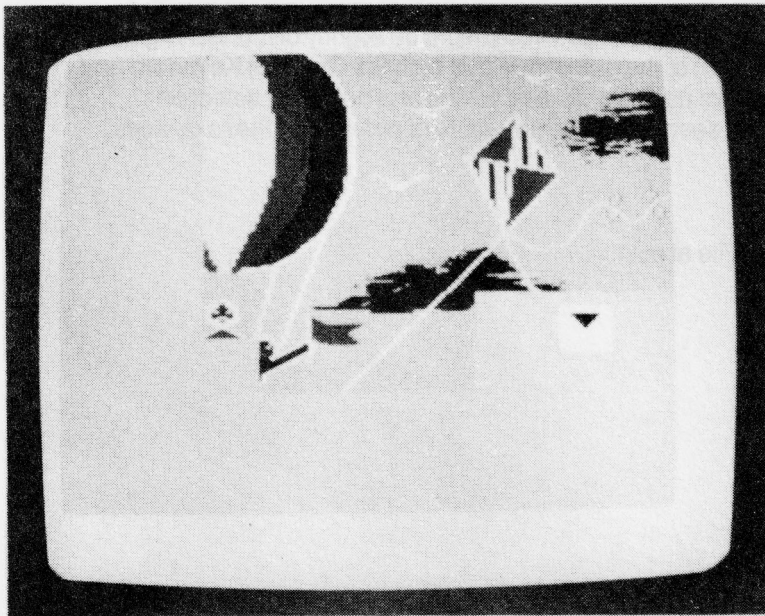
BBC B, B+, Master 128

INPUT

Analogue/user port single and double switches
Concept Keyboard
Microvitec Touch Screen
AMX Mouse
Wigmore Trackball
Marconi Rollerball
Lightpen/Photonic Wand
Interface Design Joystick
Another Joystick
Tandy Electronic Book
Keyboard

OUTPUT

Screen
Printer

**SUPPLIER**

Contact your regional SEMERC or ACE for a list of LEA distribution schools.

DOCUMENTATION

A very comprehensive guide accompanies the program.



DESCRIPTION

The program is designed as a resource for the development of inferential and predictive thinking skills and language in children with severe learning difficulties. 'Window' is a frame-work program which allows pictures to be transferred from a number of other graphic programs (for example 'Picture Play') but which is supplied with a good selection of pictures for immediate use. Although these 'picture pages' have been pre-set to operate in a particular way, each page can be presented to the child in various different ways. The key to the program is that only parts of the page are revealed at any one time. These parts, glimpsed through a 'window' are the material on which the child will work.

There are essentially four ways of using the 'windows'; 'Move', 'Move in sequence', 'Build' and 'Build in sequence'. Both the 'Move' modes open up a 'peep-hole' window on the picture to the child which can then be discussed before moving to another part of the screen. The essential difference when using the 'Build' options is that these enable a child to build up a picture, window by window, until it is entirely revealed. Common to whatever mode is used are the elements of anticipation and inference which the programs aims to develop in the child.

COMMENTS

Although the objectives within the program are modest its strength lies in its inherent flexibility. Windows can be of variable size, new pictures can be transferred from other programs and the profusion of alternative inputs is quite mesmerizing. Ironically, this does mean that users are faced with a complexity of customising menus which might be slightly disconcerting at first. Another criticism of the program is that both the Concept Keyboard and the Touch Screen are used simply as tracking and not direct selection devices. This does seem to be a slight waste of potential in these devices.

PRICE GUIDE

Available on Blue File at cost.

Printed and Published by MESU
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