



DIRECTIONS

Technology in Special Education

For Parents & Professionals

Vol. 3, No. 5

December 1996

Controlling the Environment

By Janet Hosmer

Those of us who are able-bodied control our environment in a number of different ways. If it's too hot, we open a window. If we want to watch TV, we walk over to the TV and turn it on, (or wrestle the remote control out of the hands of the male in the room). We think nothing of picking up the telephone to chat for awhile, or turning on the lights, or any number of everyday little things that we take for granted.

For those who have severe physical limitations, these simple tasks become great obstacles. Obstacles in fact to their independence. These obstacles can be overcome however with a simple control device or a full fledged Environmental Control Unit (ECU). These electronic devices can turn the pages of your book, or can control your whole household by either using switch activation or voice control. We'll take a look at a number of these wonderful pieces of technology in this article.

The *Page Turner* #4600 from TASH (Technical Aids & Systems for the Handicapped, Inc.) is a book mounting and page turning device that enables one to read virtually anything. The table mounted unit holds both hardcover and paperback books, magazines, spiral-bound notebooks, and even three-ring binders. It can turn pages both forward and backward with a single, dual or multiple switch. Here's how it works: A set of LED's (light emitting diodes) located near the top of the *Page Turner* is scanned with the activation of a single switch. Each LED represents a particular action of the *Page Turner*, such as turning a page to the left or right. When you reach the desired action, you just activate the switch.

Crestwood Company offers an adapted radio, TV, and cassette tape recorder for those with limited mobility. These electronic units can be controlled separately with the *Crestwood Touch Latch Switch* or the *Crestwood Puff Latch Switch*. Or you can use their *Control Center* to control all three together. The *Control Center* has 3 switches built into one

Please see ECU on Page 8



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My Dear Friends,

12/96

Well, tomorrow is Thanksgiving Day. (I know that you won't be reading this until sometime in December, but bear with me here...) Tom is in the sink getting 'un-frosted', the kids are home, there are a zillion things to do, the in-laws and more kids are coming for dinner tomorrow, there's 5 inches of snow outside, the kids are home (oh... did I say that already? <vbg> In spite of it all though life is very good.

I do believe that sometimes we lose sight of the good things that this life has to offer. Many of us tend to focus on what's wrong with what's going on in the world, how people don't meet up to our standards, (whatever they might be), how we never seem to have enough money at the end of the month... this list really could go on and on Unfortunately, if we focus or think about all that is wrong with life, that's all that we'll be able to see. (It's kind of a vicious circle!) But, I think that if we make everyday a thankful day our outlook and our circumstances turn much brighter. Just as we see and feel negative when we focus on negative, we get good when we focus on good. It's that simple.

I try to be thankful everyday for all the little things that are in my life that are positive, and I really try hard not to focus on what may be 'not-so-perfect'. Here's some examples: I'm thankful that the birds come to *my* birdfeeder to eat, I'm thankful that there's not 50 inches of snow outside, I'm thankful (seriously) that my kids are home with me for a few days, I'm thankful for all my friends and family, I'm thankful that someone invented soothing music, I'm thankful that the TV has an off button, I'm thankful that we can reach and help all of you each month, and I'm thankful that my kids are going back to school on Monday

It's truly all in the way you look at it.

My best to you and yours

Janet

DIRECTIONS

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Editor / Publisher
Janet P. Hosmer

Technical Editor
Chester D. Hosmer, Jr.

Administrative Assistant
Kira Boyd

Educational Consultant
Donna M. Eno

Contributors
Jamie Judd-Wall

DREAMMS FOR KIDS, Inc.
273 Ringwood Road
Freeville, NY 13068-9618
VOICE/FAX: 607.539.3027

DREAMMS@aol.com

<http://users.aol.com/dreamms/>

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Vendors - We welcome product news. Please include pricing and contact name with press releases.

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IDEA Update

Source: *TAM Connector, Volume 10, Number 1*

Newsletter: The Council for Exceptional Children - Technology & Media Division

As of early October, all further consideration of the reauthorization of IDEA came to an end for the 104th Congress. A formal statement to that effect has been issued by Sen. William Frist (R-Tenn.), chair of the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Disability Policy, dated Sept. 30, 1996.

After passing the House early this summer, the Senate failed to resolve several key issues in time for the final bill to be passed. Had the Senate approved the bill in the waning days of the session, there would have been far too little time for the House-Senate conferees to iron out what appeared to be significant difference between the two versions of the bill and then get it passed once again by each house.

Background: IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) and the 14 programs expired in October 1995. In 1993, the Department of Education, and the then Democratically controlled House and Senate began working on reauthorization. After the elections of 1994, new committee chairs representing the Republicans took over the process and proceeded to work on the new bills. With so many other issues in the early days of Congress, IDEA was never fully addressed. In addition, many newly interested constituent groups, namely parents, administrators, school boards, teacher unions, other education groups, and other disability groups wanted to offer their input into IDEA.

Thus, the process was delayed in both the House and Senate.

Future: Unless there is a special session called in the post election period, it will be necessary to begin again in the 105th Congress meeting this winter. It is very important that IDEA gets reauthorized early in the session. In the meantime, the basic IDEA program, being permanently authorized will continue as is. The support programs (including Technology, Media and Materials) will continue as long as funding is provided.

For a free copy of the full article, contact DREAMMS for Kids, Inc. §

ERIC Offers Wealth of Resources

Source: *Community Update, No. 41, November 1996*

Newsletter: The Council for Exceptional Children - Technology & Media Division

The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) system, which includes, the world's largest and most frequently searched education database, celebrates its 30th anniversary during this year. ERIC is a dynamic source of print and electronic materials for improving teaching, learning, parenting, and school management with an array of free products and services available to parents, educators and community members.

The ERIC system is part of the U.S. Department of Education's National

Library of Education, with 16 subject-specific ERIC Clearinghouses and 10 Adjunct Clearinghouses. ERIC Clearinghouses produce more than 250 special publications each year on current research programs, and practices, including the popular ERIC Digests, 2-page summaries on topics such as reading instruction and educational technology. The clearinghouses also respond to thousands of e-mail, phone, and mail requests for information.

ERIC is keeping pace with the increasing emphasis on the role of

parents in their children's education by preparing and distributing free parent materials in print and electronic formats. Parent brochures that provide answers to

commonly asked questions on topics such as playground safety, school readiness, and college planning are available for ACCESS ERIC. Call 1-800-LET-ERIC to request the current set. The National Parent Information Network (<http://ericps.ed.uiuc.edu/npin/npinhome.html>) is a World Wide Web site providing short articles on child

Please See ERIC on Page 8

ATFSCP Notes

The Assistive Technology Funding and Systems Change Project

Common Funding Excuses Related to Computers and Environmental Control Units

PRIVATE INSURANCE:

Computers & Environmental Control Devices Are Not Covered Services In This Policy

The first, and most important response to all insurance matters is to carefully review the insurance policy. In contrast to Medicaid, special education and vocational rehabilitation, there are no federal laws that specify what must be in health insurance policies. And, even though many states regulate insurance, including the scope of coverage, there are many exceptions.

For these reasons, the bottom line is the insurance policy. Insurance is a contract: the scope of the insurance company's obligations to pay for medical expenses is limited to the express terms of the insurance policy and their reasonable interpretation.

A contract is nothing more than an agreement between two people: one who promises to supply goods or services, in this case the insurance company, and the other, who promises to provide payment for those goods or services. But health insurance is a very unusual contract because the basic agreement setting out both the scope of coverage and the total cost is most often made by the insurance company and an employer, not the employee who will utilize the covered services.

For most people, health insurance is a fringe benefit to employment. The health insurance plan, possibly more than one, is available for the employee

to enroll in at the start of employment. Or, an alternative is that the company (particularly large employers) may "self insure" meaning that it operates its own health insurance program.

In either case, the health insurance plan is created for the benefit of the employees, but in almost every case, the employees have little or no voice in its terms. Rather, health insurance is presented as a 'take it or leave it' proposition. However, due to the extraordinary costs of health care, few people offered employer provided health insurance will refuse.

Not only will the people who will benefit from the health insurance not have a real choice in determining the scope of insurance coverage, they are not likely ever to see the official documents, i.e., the actual contract or self insurance plan. Rather, they receive a "summary of benefits" booklet, or a similar publication. This booklet is generally is provided to employees at the time they are hired.

These booklets are supposed to be written in plain English, but very often this is not the case. They confuse because they do not supply a clearly presented list of which services are covered, which are limited, and which are not covered. They should, but do not, supply sufficient information about the services that the policy will cover,

any employee responsibilities for prior approval, co-payment, or deductibles, and any limitations on coverage, such as services not covered, and/or limits on services utilization (e.g., not greater than a certain number of sessions or total cost per year, or total cost over the lifetime of the policy).

Many times, these booklets leave the employee uncertain whether certain care, treatment and services are covered or not, or whether conditions or restrictions will apply. This is particularly true in regard to persons requiring assistive technology devices and services.

Computers and environmental control devices and services (evaluation, devices/systems purchase or rental, and follow along services) are unlikely to be identified specifically in the booklet. Instead, it will be necessary to determine whether the policy covers any services that can be interpreted to include these devices.

The key to insurance coverage for computer technology is to look at the list of covered services. If the policy states that speech language pathology or speech therapy, occupational therapy, durable medical equipment, and/or prosthetic devices are covered, then the policy should cover computers and environmental control devices. The rationale for coverage under these

services is explained in the Medicaid excuses of this memorandum.

Once a covered service is found that should include computer technology, the insurer should be requested to provide funding. The particulars of the request may be spelled out in the policy. If so, special care must be followed to comply with those requirements.

In general, a physician must prescribe the requested device, and a speech therapist, occupational therapist or physical therapist must prepare a justification. The justification must explain:

- *the prospective user's physical impairments;
- *his or her functional limitations without the requested device;
- *how his or her safety and/or medical needs are compromised; and
- *how the requested technology will be used, and how it will benefit the user, i.e., how it will improve his or her functional abilities, improve self care, independence or self determination, or how safety/medical needs issues will be addressed by the use of the requested device.

If the insurer rejects the request for funding, the policy may provide for an internal appeal. The appeal is often just a letter stating why the adverse funding decision was improper, and adding any further information that may have been omitted in the initial application. The appeal also should

make clear the applicant's belief that the policy in fact covers the requested device, and that the rejection was inconsistent with the policy.

Working with a knowledgeable physical or occupational therapist will be very helpful. The therapist may have worked with this insurer before, and will be able to cite previous examples of device funding. The therapist also may be aware of funding decisions by other policies with the same covered services. In either case, these examples should be included in the appeal letter. In addition, three other things should be addressed:

- *have all the documentation requirements stated in the policy been followed? Have all of the necessary forms, justifications, etc. been submitted? If not, then these documents must be supplied.
- *the appeal letter should make specific reference should to the covered service(s) that will support funding (physical therapy, occupational therapy, durable medical equipment, prosthetics) and the insurer should be specifically asked to explain why coverage is not available under any/all of these services.

Many insurance companies limit coverage of durable medical equipment to U.S. Food & Drug Administration approved devices. Many seating, positioning and mobility devices have received FDA approval. The appeal letter should make specific reference to the fact that the device being requested is an approved medical device by the FDA. This information will be available from the device manufacturer, and is likely to be known by the therapist who makes the device recommendation.

Very often, the insurer will not be able to supply a reason why the device is not within the scope of these covered services, and funding will be provided. §

To secure general information on the project, contact: Assistive Technology Funding & Systems Change Project, 1660 L Street, NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20036
 Tel: (202) 776- 0406 Fax: (202) 776-0414 Email: atfscp@aol.com. To secure information & individual assistance on AT funding issues, contact: 1-800-827-0093 (voice) 1-800-833-8272 (TDD), or (404) 919-8305 (fax).

The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or the policy of the u.s. Department of Education, and no official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of the opinions expressed herein should be inferred.



Technology & Inclusion

Expanding Personal Productivity: Assistive Technology in Grades 6-8

Jamie Judd-Wall

In this month's article we are going to be discussing assistive technology and students with disabilities in the middle school - grades six through eight.

Setting Educational Priorities

It is during the middle school years that parents and teachers help students think about educational priorities. What prerequisite skills need to be in place for the college-bound student? What vocational skills need to be in place for the student bound for employment at graduation? Is your student a candidate for post-secondary programming in school? These and other questions are initially discussed while the student is in middle school.

It is during these years that parents and teachers begin to make choices about how the student's educational day is spent. In elementary school students go to their classroom; and even in situations in upper elementary school where students change between two or three teachers, curriculum choices are not really made available to the students or their families. For the first time, students, their families and teachers have to decide "you will take this class and you won't take that class". There just isn't enough time in the day to do everything.

Changing Expectations and Changing Activities

As I said in last month's article, you may be wondering what all this has I

to do with assistive technology. As we are reaching the time for educational benchmarks, we are also reaching the time for technological benchmarks. We may not really notice if a student has been underserved technologically speaking during elementary school. Having just one or two teachers in most elementary school programs, lighter tech modifications can suffice. In addition, modifications and other accommodations are easier for the teacher in elementary school who just has 25-30 students. In the middle school program, one teacher may see 150- 200 different students.

*** Let me add at this point - before all the elementary school teachers send in cards and letters - that I am not saying or implying that teaching elementary school is easier or less demanding than middle school teaching ...simply that elementary school teachers know their students better faster because there are fewer of them.

When fully functional technological systems are not in place, it becomes obvious very quickly. Most assistive technology issues for middle school students arise because the student needs technological support for productivity and that support is not in place.

Productivity Issues

For the student with productivity issues, their experiences with low tech modifications and dictation are going to

show up in the increased amount of written work expected in middle school. When student's don't have experience with a balanced set of modification that allow for adequate opportunities to interact with information in print, they create documents which lack the writing maturity middle school teachers expect. The content may be accurate; but the syntactic maturity, sentence structure, vocabulary, language sequencing and thematic maturity are not present. The sentences tend to be short and without elaboration because in the student's past experience he or she has dictated to a third party without actually seeing the document as it is created. Students have to personally interact with print to become skilled at creating print.

There is no doubt that technological supports for increasing student productivity are available. Word processors with and without speech output, with spell checking and other features are readily available. There are literally hundreds of pieces of instructional software to address skill deficits but remember that middle school is a time of difficult decisions... there isn't enough time in the day.

For the student with productivity issues in the middle school, parents and teachers need to consider the following questions:

*** When and where modifications and productivity software would be used?** Is there a computer in each

classroom? Is there a school-wide media center? Is there a before and/or after-school access option?

*** How the use of instructional software would be supported in the classroom?** Is there a software guide that correlates with the curriculum or essential elements? Is there a software review team on campus?

*** Who would be responsible for implementing the modification and software aspects of XXX's IEP?** Is there a technology teacher? Is there a volunteer from the community that can help? Is there a community college that can lend support?

*** What is the level of skill and training necessary for the person or persons implementing the technology?** Are there local resources? Are there technological supports available by phone? Are there workshops or conferences in the area?

*** Who will be responsible for teaching the student the technological and composition skills needed to be an effective technological producer as compared to an effective pencil & paper producer?** Remember when you first used the computer ... try to find the first thing you wrote on the computer and compare it to what you create now. The changes you experienced to become an effective technological producer are the same changes your students need to experience. The help you received is the help they need to get!

I have found that is important to maintain a balance. For students (and

teachers) without experience in technological productivity, set realistic goals. Don't completely abandon low tech modifications ...but don't sit the student in front of a computer and think that's all it takes. Fit technology into the writing process... make the computer and productivity software work for you.

Productivity Reality

I have to admit that this has been a difficult article for me to write. All too often I am called in to do a student's first assistive technology assessment when they are in middle school or high school. The students and teachers both are struggling to keep their educational heads above water.

The difficult reality is that students with disabilities need direct instruction and massed practice with their assistive technology tools during elementary years if those tools are to be used effectively as the medium for production in secondary school and the adult world. When that instruction and practice are lacking, we spend the rest of their educational years trying to compensate.

Next Month: High School: Are You Ready for the Adult World?

Technology & Inclusion is a not-for-profit, tax exempt 501(c)(3) agency based in Austin, TX. Created by a group of concerned parents and professionals in 1994, their vision was to establish an organization that would work with individuals with disabilities, their families and professionals with the goal being maximally inclusive service delivery - at school, work and in the community. Jamie Judd-Wall is the Executive Director of this agency.

DIRECTIONS

Technology in Special Education

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Each issue is filled with valuable assistive technology information and tips, along with product information and news. Please send \$2.50 (check, PO, Visa or MasterCard) for each issue requested along with your name and address to:

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rearing and child development as well as electronic discussion groups.

You can search the ERIC database, which contains descriptions of nearly a million educational documents and journal articles, on any education-related topic. If you have access to the Internet, you can do a free ERIC search at <http://ericir.syr.edu>. You may also use ERIC at more than 800 locations across the country; call 1-800-LET-ERIC for the location of a library near you.

ERIC Clearinghouses have toll-free numbers as well as e-mail and Web addresses. If you need information and are not sure where to start, call 1-800-LET-ERIC or e-mail your question to askeric@ericir.syr.edu. You can also explore ERIC resources by starting with the system-wide World Wide Web page at <http://www.aspensys.com/eric>. The award-winning AskERIC Virtual Library (<http://ericir.syr.edu>) provides hundred of lesson plans and InfoGuides that help users navigate the Internet. §

ECU Continued from Page 1

panel. A single switch turns it on and it will stay on indefinitely, with a single switch turning it off.

Director from Prentke Romich Company allows you to take control of your TV, VCR, stereo, CD player and other electrical appliances. The *Director* can be operated with speech-output communication devices such as PRC's Touch Talker™, Light Talker™, or Liberator™, or with other devices which output ASCII code in an RS232 serial format, including certain computers. Each command, such as TV ON or VOLUME UP, is typed and then stored in the communication device for later recall. When the appropriate symbol is selected, the *Director* sends the proper infrared signal to the TV. The *Scanning Director II* is intended for people who can operate either a single or dual switch. Scan through a menu of options on the back-lit display and activate the switch to send the signal.

Multimedia Max from Multimedia Designs, Inc., is a voice activated IBM compatible multimedia computer designed specifically to assist physically challenged individuals in controlling their environment. *Multimedia Max* incorporates the following features: voice control of: 256 different lights and electrical appliances; unlimited infrared appliances; speakerphone, answering machine, fax machine, modem; remote camera with scalable picture on computer monitor; and built in TV tuner including auto scanning of 12 channels. *Multimedia Max* also

Please See ECU on Page 11

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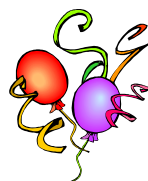
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DREAMMS FOR KIDS, INC.

Assistive Technology Solutions
273 Ringwood Road
Freeville, NY 13068
Phone/Fax: 607.539.3027

DREAMMS@aol.com

<http://users.aol.com/dreamms/>

Software Review - Mighty Math Zoo Zillions

Edmark Corporation 1-800-691-2985

Five to eight-year-old children will love learning math with *Mighty Math Zoo Zillions*, Edmark's new companion program to the recently released *Mighty Math Carnival Countdown*. Together, these two products cover all the major topics in the kindergarten through second grade math curricula. These program's are part of Edmark's comprehensive Mighty Math Series, designed to teach five-to fourteen-year-olds the math concepts behind the facts and help them master the thinking skills necessary for successful problem solving.

In *Mighty Math Zoo Zillions*, Ryan the Lion, the Otter Twins and other animal friends guide kids on a numerical adventure that's wild with excitement! In five fun-filled activities, kids visit a 3D Gallery, ride the Number, Line Express, travel the Jungle Trail, staff the Gnu Ewe Boutique and solve Fish Stories at a one-of-a-kind aquarium. As kids explore and answer questions, they'll

ZOO ZILLIONS LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

- *Problem Solving
- *Inductive & Deductive Reasoning
- *Number Relationships & Counting on a Number Line
- *Counting, Adding & Subtracting Money & Making Change
- *Addition & Subtraction Facts & Mental Math
- *Spoken Story Problems Featuring Addition, Subtraction, Multiplication & Division
- *Counting Forward & Backward by 2's, 5's & 10's
- *Spatial Awareness
- *Early 3D Geometry

learn addition, subtraction, story problems, number facts, 3D shapes, counting money and making change.

Program Features

* Many activities contain Virtual Manipulatives, a unique educational technology that helps kids connect concrete concepts with abstract numerals.

* As children learn and succeed, Grow Slides advance, offering more challenging problems from dozens of math topics.

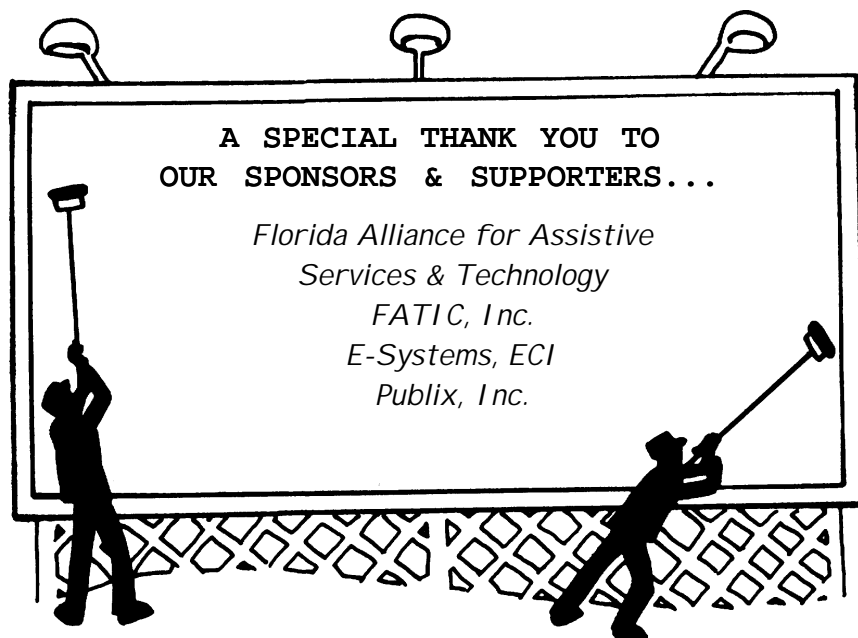
* The program will remember and track each child's progress in every activity.

* Most of the activities feature a Question & Answer Mode and an Explore Mode to allow for both directed and self-directed learning

Platform Availability

Zoo Zillions is available on dual platform CD-ROM for Windows and Macintosh for \$69.95.

Our Rating: A +



CONFERENCES

H appy
H olidays

provides voice control access to CD-ROM, online services, and the Internet, along with speech-to-text dictation in any Microsoft Windows word processor.

Proxi from Madenta is also a full featured Environmental Control Unit. *Proxi* can be used with a Macintosh or Windows computer environment, or with an Apple Newton, Liberator, Dynavox, and more... Basically any device that sends data over an RS232 serial port will provide you with a platform for control.

As you can see, there are a variety of devices available depending on the

needs and abilities of the specific individual. Remember too, that this is not an exhaustive list. There are many more in the years to come as technology becomes more advanced. § assist individuals with physical limitations in controlling their environment. And there will be many more in the years to come as technology becomes more advanced. §

VENDORS OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL DEVICES		
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All-Turn-It Spinner

Minneapolis, MN-AbleNet, Inc. has an exciting new addition to their line of learning and leisure products. The *All-Turn-It* spinner and accessory packages allow persons with even the most severe disabilities to participate in a number of commercially available and AbleNet designed games. With the *All-Turn-It* spinner, people with disabilities can interact, learn and have fun, all at the same time.

The *All-Turn-It* spinner can be activated via a one-inch built-in switch or the user's own switch. A single switch activation makes both the arrow and the small overlay spin independently, providing visual interest and random selection of two different items. The spinner is made of strong durable plastic, has a built-in stand for easy viewing, comes with a dice overlay, meets all U.S. consumer toy safety specifications, is appropriate for ages three to adult, and sells for \$89.00

AbleNet, Inc.
1081 Tenth Avenue, S.E.
Minneapolis, MN 55414-1312
800-322-0956



Joystick (& Mouse) Trainer

Dana Point, CA-RJ Cooper & Assoc. has just delivered its new demo, *Joystick (& Mouse) Trainer*. *Joystick (and Mouse) Trainer* starts with very obvious auditory and visual feedback of joystick movement, and progresses through incrementally challenging activities, all the way to moving a character through a fairly complex maze. It provides beginning through intermediate joystick/mouse training. *Joystick (and Mouse) Trainer* also works great for training mouse skills, using a mouse or a trackball, such as the large *SAM-TRACKball*, which also is switch-adapted to be able to do the clicking via an external switch. You can also use ANY pointing device capable of moving the cursor!

RJ Cooper & Associates
24843 Del Prado #283
Dana Point, CA 92629
800-RJCooper

kidBoard & COMPUTERTOTS

Minneapolis, MN-kidBoard, inc., a developer of award-winning children's input devices and educational software, announced its strategic partnership with COMPUTERTOTS, a global leader in providing computer educational classes to children. The goal of this partnership is to equip COMPUTERTOTS (ages 3-5) and Computer Explorer (ages 6 and up) with the very best tools for exploring the world of computers. Beyond just using the kidBoard products in classes, COMPUTERTOTS has created a dedicated curriculum that incorporates the features of the kidBoard keyboard and the kidDraw drawing tablet.

kidBoard, inc. is dedicated to linking children with technology. Its product family of children's peripherals has won numerous awards. Their products support IBM-compatible and Macintosh computers and are available through retailers worldwide.

kidBoard, inc.
6545 France Avenue South, Suite 376
Edina, MN 55435
612-926-7995

 **DREAMMS**
for kids, Inc.
Assistive Technology Solutions
273 Ringwood Road • Freeville, NY 13068-5606

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