

MUESLI NEWS

May 1985

Editor

David Eastment

Contents

IATEFL

Core Programs

Programmer's Corner - Arthur Rope

Software Reviews

MUESLI NEWS

Issue Number two: May 1985

Welcome to the (long-awaited) second edition of MUESLI NEWS. I hope that we have solved production problems now, and will be able to bring out future Newsletters on a two-monthly basis, but of course this is largely dependent on our readership!

One of the very real reasons for producing the Newsletter is to keep people in touch with software as it comes out, and to try to avoid us all squandering our limited budgets on the same old nonsense. In this issue, in addition to two rather asperous software reviews, there is a short piece recommending a bare minimum of programs for people starting up in CALL. By the next issue we aim to have drawn up a more exhaustive list of what is on the market.

Also included with this issue is a List of Members. Please let the Editor know of any errors or omissions.

REPORTS ON RECENT MEETINGS:

We have held two meetings in the last five months: one at the end of November, where we focussed on Adventures, and a second in March on the theme of writing.

The November session was very well attended, and was introduced by Chris Jones. Chris outlined the problems many of us have found with using adventures: the length of time it takes to solve them (sometimes a month or more!); the unsuitable topics (the Dungeons and Dragons syndrome); and the sub-standard language often produced by the computer. Armando Boltra, Brazil, has suggested tackling these problems by selecting adventures with the least outrageous scenarios and the least outrageous vocabulary, such as Ken Williams MYSTERY HOUSE, or perhaps Acornsofts own SPOOKY MANOR, and then getting the teacher to make the whole business more manageable by setting limited tasks, providing worksheets, and even producing a set of rhyming clues!

Another solution, of course, would be to produce adventures specifically for the EFL classroom carefully controlled in terms of language level, length etc. Chris then demonstrated Flash Rog a program written by some of his students, which excited a good deal of (mostly positive) comment.

Workshops in the afternoon were led by Arthur Rope and Sue Fortescue. Considerable interest was shown in Arthurs program for single-key disc access: a listing has been printed at the end of the Newsletter.

The March session was kicked off by David Eastment, who talked about using wordprocessors and Teletext in the Classroom, and demonstrated the Colleges internal Viewdata system BELTEXT. David outlined some of the advantages of using micros for writing: the real-world nature of the activity; the way that it encouraged editing and redrafting; the cooperation around the keyboard that it seemed to engender; and the fact that writing is non-judgmental. In programs such as Storyboard, only one answer can be correct: a fact which tends to inhibit, rather than encourage discussion. When writing, however, students can constantly be involved in improving what is on the screen.

In the afternoon, a range of software was viewed and demonstrated, including a presentation of Longmans new QUARTEXT by Nick Reckert, and some recent programs from Arnold-Wheat (see Software Reviews). (tme)

IATEFL: An original feature of IATEFL this year was a day devoted to CALL, in parallel with

Eurocentres and other institutions, there was a series of talks and presentations by MUESLI members on various aspects of CALL. The emphasis was very much on informality and hand on, so much so that enthusiastic users at the back of the hall often all but drowned out some of the speakers, but an enormous amount of interest was generated: we were snowed under with requests for more information. The overall feeling seemed to be that although we still have a way to go in terms of program quality, standardisation, methodology etc, there is no doubt that CALL is, for better or for worse, here to stay.

Thanks are due to Brian North for his unfailing enthusiasm and energy in co-ordinating the whole day. (de)

CORE PROGRAMS:

Several people have asked me what I would consider the bare minimum of programs to buy and run on a BBC. I have therefore drawn up a list - and admittedly a subjective one - including prices and suppliers (where known).

A basic list would comprise something like the following:

A set of authoring programs to create a large amount of in-house produced texts;

A word-processor for reports, worksheets etc as well as for student use;

A teletext package of some sort, either for a fully-fledged information service, or for running electronic class magazines etc;

A set of programs to promote oral interaction around the keyboard;

Miscellaneous.

Here, then, are my choices:

Authoring. WIDA (now distributed by Cassell/Holt) have pretty well cornered the market here. Their:

VOCAB: A suite of six attractively presented vocabulary games and activities.

CLOZEMASTER: Can handle texts of up to about 300 words. The student selects his own deletion rate, and has help and cheat facilities.

CHOICEMASTER: Up to 30 multiple choice questions.

STORYBOARD: One of the better versions of this ubiquitous program!

All the above can be used with free-standing micros or over a Level Two net, and are available for £29.95 per pack (two disks plus documentation) from Holt Software Division, Holt Saunders Ltd, 1 St. Annes Road, Eastbourne, East Sussex BN21 1BR. Other authoring packages are available from Hutchinson and Longman, and vocabulary and reading authors are due soon from CUP and OUP.

Wordprocessing: Of the many processors available, one needs to strike a balance between power and flexibility on the one hand, and ease of use for students on the other. My own choice would be Wordwise, available from Computer Concepts, 16 Wayside, Chipperfield, Herts WD15 9JJ. (An upgraded version, Wordwise Plus, has just come on to the market at a price of £52, I have not used this myself yet.)

Teletext: A wide range of teletext packages is now available: at least 10, at the last count. Most of them have primitive editors, however, or are limited to a painfully restricted number of pages. Among the best is Edfax, available from Tecmedia, 5 Granby Street, Loughborough LE11 3DL. Unfortunately, Edfax is not networkable at the time of writing, although a network version is in production.

Oral Interaction: In the light of Chris Jones' talk, I wish there were some Adventures that I could wholeheartedly recommend, but quite frankly there aren't! They all have their pros and cons, and their successful use seems to depend very much on the background (and sex?) of the student.

stores, c. £9). It is imaginative and involving, and largely free of the gratuitous spelling mistakes which mar many of its stablemates. It is also very challenging and time-consuming: fortunately there is a save facility so that the user does not need to start from the beginning each time. Tombs of Arkenstone is slightly more educational, and comes with booklets, maps etc. It also allows students to author their own Adventures, within rather strict limits. (Arnold-Wheaton. For address, see Reviews).

Games and simulations are rather better served. The problem here is to choose ones which are neither too trivial to engage students' interest, nor so complex as to require reading a complete manual before they can be used!

Kingdom, from the Welcome Pack, still seems to have a remarkable amount of mileage in it, as does the MEPs LITTER, in which the students try to solve a town's litter problem by the allocation of the various resources.

Another great favourite is GBLTD (Simon Heskell Software, 15 Lytham Court, Cardwell Crescent, Sunninghill, Berks.) This delightful program challenges the students to manage the British economy for five years, and then get themselves re-elected. In spite of its relative complexity and thorough documentation, it seems to be in constant use! (In contrast, programs such as BPs SLIP which simulates an oil pollution disaster, or Bournes superb conservation game OSPREY are underused, in spite -or perhaps because of- their excellent documentation and supplementary materials.) FARM, (Primary Programs) and FACEMAKER (A. S. K.), both reviewed in the last issue, are also widely used, and produce a great deal of discussion and debate. Finally, a personal favourite of mine are the Heinemann Dudley programs, especially their Travel Pack, now last available on disk instead of those tedious cassettes. Unfortunately, they are copy-protected which means that you can neither back them up nor change the data: but they are nevertheless a useful resource. (Heinemann Computers in Education, 22 Bedford Square, London WC1 3EJ)

Miscellaneous: One program my students have made very profitable use in their free time is a self-instructional typing tutor. Of the very many available, the best we have discovered is Typi Tutor, produced by Contex Computing, 15 Woodlands Close, Cople, BEDFORD. (st)

PROGRAMMERS CORNER:

There was some interest at a recent MUESLI meeting in a program allowing students to select programs - or text files - from a screen-menu with the touch of a single key. All the programs available to the student can be stored in a single directory, such that only these, and not the various editing/deleting etc programs are displayed.

Arthur Rope has kindly sent in a copy of a program for just this. (The program originates in an ITMA copyright listing.)

When run, or !BOOTed, the index will appear on screen. If the disk has no title, the files in the directory will be displayed. If the disk has been titled (with *TITLE) then the first letter of the title will be taken to indicate the directory to be listed and the rest of the title, excluding the first two letters/symbols will be displayed at the top of the screen, followed by the files in the chosen directory. In other words, if you want only the P. directory files to be listed, start your disk title P and a full-stop, e.g. P.PROGRAMS1.

The program listing will be found at the end of the Newsletter.

HELP! Does anybody out there know why the return character &0D is inserted when SPOOL Wordwise text, and how it can be removed? Answers on a postcard, please.

OSCLI: A surprising number of programmers are not aware of the OSCLI (Operating System Command Line Interpreter) calls. These are in fact mentioned in the User Guide, but little is made of them. What they allow you to do is to use Operating System commands with variable form within your BASIC program. As you know, it is impossible to write lines such as *DELET

become OSCLI (DELETE+A\$) and OSCLI (LOAD +PAGE\$+ 7800)

NOTE: If you are writing your own BASIC programs and are having problems, drop a line to the Editor. No guarantees, but we might be able to help! Any useful routines (input checking, case changing, file handling etc) are also very welcome.

SMILE:

We have recently set up a publication exchange with SMILE (Society for Micros in Life and Education) in Tokyo. SMILE is not specifically devoted to CALL, but many of its members are EFL. The Editor is Hillel Weintraub (see membership list)

COURSES:

Leeds University is running an introductory course for English Teachers from 3-12 September this year. (Information from the Department of Continuing Education, The University, Leeds LS9 9JT.)

Bell College is also running a course, with specific reference to TEFL, from 11-17 August. (Information from the Registrar, Bell College, Saffron Walden CB11 3DP).

BOOKS:

If your school runs any sort of Computer Club or extracurricular programme, I can certainly recommend three pamphlets from MUSE. Written by Richard OSilva, they cover BASIC, Further BASIC and Assembler on the BBC, and cost around 80p a copy. They are not complete courses but are activity based, and attend for classes and clubs where there is an expert about to help (MUSE Publications, PO Box 43, Hull HU1 2HD)

CIC have just published a guide to screen display. At £5, it struck me as rather overpriced, but makes some useful points on text presentation, colour, use of animation etc in its 40 pages. (Guide to Effective Screen Display, Computers in the Curriculum, Educational Computing Section, Chelsea College, 552 Kings Road, London SW10 0UA).

SOFTWARE REVIEWS:

WHATS YOUR REASON? (cassette only, £10) The purpose of this program is to promote discussion of empirical facts, objective statements and subjective opinions, judgements or beliefs. Thus the blurb. What appears when the program is run is a trivial and trivialising one-armed bandit type of game. The top reel spins, and eventually comes to rest on a statement of some sort: England won the World Cup in 1966 or Henry VIII had six wives. The bottom wheel then rotates and stops on a possible reason: My friend told me, or I believe this though it cannot be proved. The students can either accept the reason, or nudge for another, or gamble for some reason which eluded me. At the end of the session, the pairs of statements and reasons are displayed on the screen, and students are asked to justify their choice. Incidentally, there is no way of changing the spinning speed, which can sometimes be tediously slow, nor of easily amending the underlying data. The on-screen presentation is rather good.

ANIMAL, VEGETABLE, MINERAL (80 track disk, £15) If you've seen ANIMALS or PANGOLIN or Bournes ANIMAL, VEGETABLE, you'll know what this program is like. The aim is for the students to teach the computer vocabulary items within a chosen topic. The lists thus created can then be saved to disk and the computer can be challenged to guess the students' words or vice versa. I wish I could say that Arnold have produced an effective implementation of this rather hackneyed idea, but sadly they have not. Indeed, quite the reverse. The screen display is unattractive; the user is only allowed to input very short sentences; and the whole caboodle crashes at every opportunity. Not recommended!