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MSC Arts Committee
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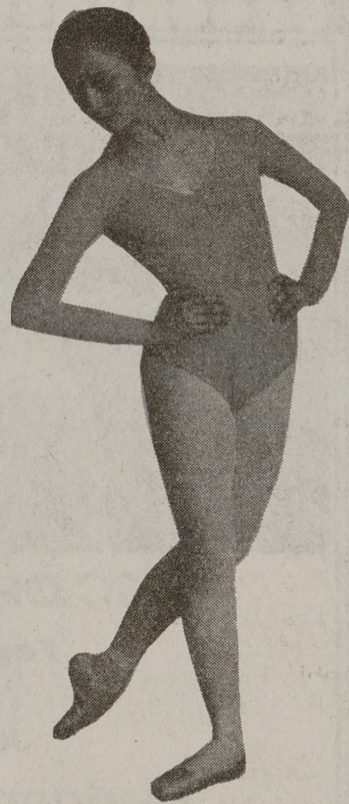
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national

Battalion/Page 12
 January 21, 1982

Computer world non-violent

Learning as easy as ABC

United Press International
 In the real world, if a car runs over a rabbit, it's curtains for the cottontail.

In the computer-assisted learning world, when a child in the first, second or third grade "touches out" a sentence that reads, "The car runs over the rabbit," something else happens.

The child, sitting at a video display terminal, hits the word "next" on his touch-sensitive screen and then little lines form themselves into shapes above the sentence on the screen. The lines become a drawing depicting the action in the sentence: A car is crossing a bridge; underneath the bridge, safe, is a rabbit. The car is "running over" the rabbit — but not killing him.

The reporter playing the role of a child got that result when trying out a computerized learning system into which \$850 million has been invested in the last 20 years.

"But in real life, that is not what happens when a car runs over a rabbit," the reporter objected to Daria Skeete, education consultant to Control Data Corp., the computer company that sired the system called

PLATO. "That's true," she replied. "This is a non-violent version."

The touch-screen that goes with the PLATO system developed at the University of Illinois, Urbana, gives off an electronic beep when the pupil puts his finger on a block or letter or circle.

"But in real life, that is not what happens when a car runs over a rabbit," the reporter objected.

"That's true," the consultant replied. "This is a non-violent version."

This is electronic learning on an individualized basis. To the fingertip the screen feels like a piece of plastic, which it is. It feels like a sheet of plastic with a pocket of air underneath it. Which it is.

Touching it conveys an electronic message — the pupil's choice of words or figures in a learning game.

Another PLATO instructional program displayed for the reporter contained letters of the alphabet, a mouse, a mousetrap and a piece of cheese — all formed on the electronic screen.

This was a program to help boys and girls with their ABCs. The entertaining aspect — the mouse gets rewarded for correct choices, punished for incorrect choices. The learning game consisted of the first 18 letters of the alphabet, presented in block form — three rows of six letters each.

In the lower left hand corner was a graphic. A mouse.

In the upper right hand corner was a place for punishments to be recorded for wrong choices. The punishment graphic was a mousetrap.

In the left hand corner was the place to record rewards. Pictures of pieces of cheese.

First a child has a choice of two letters to pick the one that come after A. One is B. One is D. Press D and the mouse gets a mousetrap. Press B and the mouse gets a piece of cheese.

The fun aspect is one of the selling-points of the computerized learning systems is that some authorities expect to be commonplace in schools of tomorrow.

Skeete, a graduate of Brooklyn College (N.Y.), was in education seven years before joining the PLATO operation. She spoke of a PLATO basic skills learning system study at the Adult Learning Center in Baltimore, Md.

Forty-three students took the math course — 24 hours with PLATO and 13 hours with the PLATO math workbook. Result: a gain of two grade levels in math performance.

Twenty in the adult basic education course spent 21 hours on the PLATO reading program and 11 hours with the PLATO reading workbook. Result: an average gain of one year in read-

ing level. There also are about 10 PLATO learning centers Skeete said.

Catherine Brashich, a graduate of St. Joseph's College in Hartford, Conn., is manager of one in New York City. She said one person, child or adult, taking the Basic Skills Learning course first tested to determine level of achievement and then assigned to the computerized program enabling him or her to learn at his or her own pace.

"The system," she said, "lets children learn to read, construct sentences, and work basic math operations without fear of failure, of appearing ignorant to others, or of falling behind. The motivation is tremendous."

Brashich based her view on what she has seen happen at the center and what she has

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observed among her children trying out PLATO courses.

The PLATO system is used by about 100 school systems, including universities and colleges, said a spokesman for Control Data, a Minneapolis firm. The system consists of hardware, software, and courseware — 8,000 hours of it published to date.

Brashich said rental of eight computer terminals would cost a school about \$80,000 a year.

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PERSPECTIVES ON SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY



ON FEBRUARY 10-13, 1982 STUDENT LEADERS FROM CANADA, GERMANY, MEXICO, GUATEMALA, KUWAIT, AND VARIOUS PARTS OF THE CONTINENTAL UNITED STATES WILL CONVERGE ON THE TEXAS A&M CAMPUS FOR THE 27TH ANNUAL STUDENT CONFERENCE ON NATIONAL AFFAIRS. THIS YEARS CONFERENCE IS ENTITLED "PERSPECTIVES ON SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY."

For an opportunity to represent Texas A&M as a delegate to SCONA 27, please pick up an application in the Student Programs Office, room 216 in the Memorial Student Center. Interviews will be conducted Tuesday, January 26 through Thursday, January 28, 3-5 p.m.

For an opportunity to serve as a host or hostess to SCONA 27, please pick up an application in the Student Programs Office, room 216 in the Memorial Student Center. Interviews will be held Tuesday, January 26 and Wednesday, January 27.

MSC SCONA 27