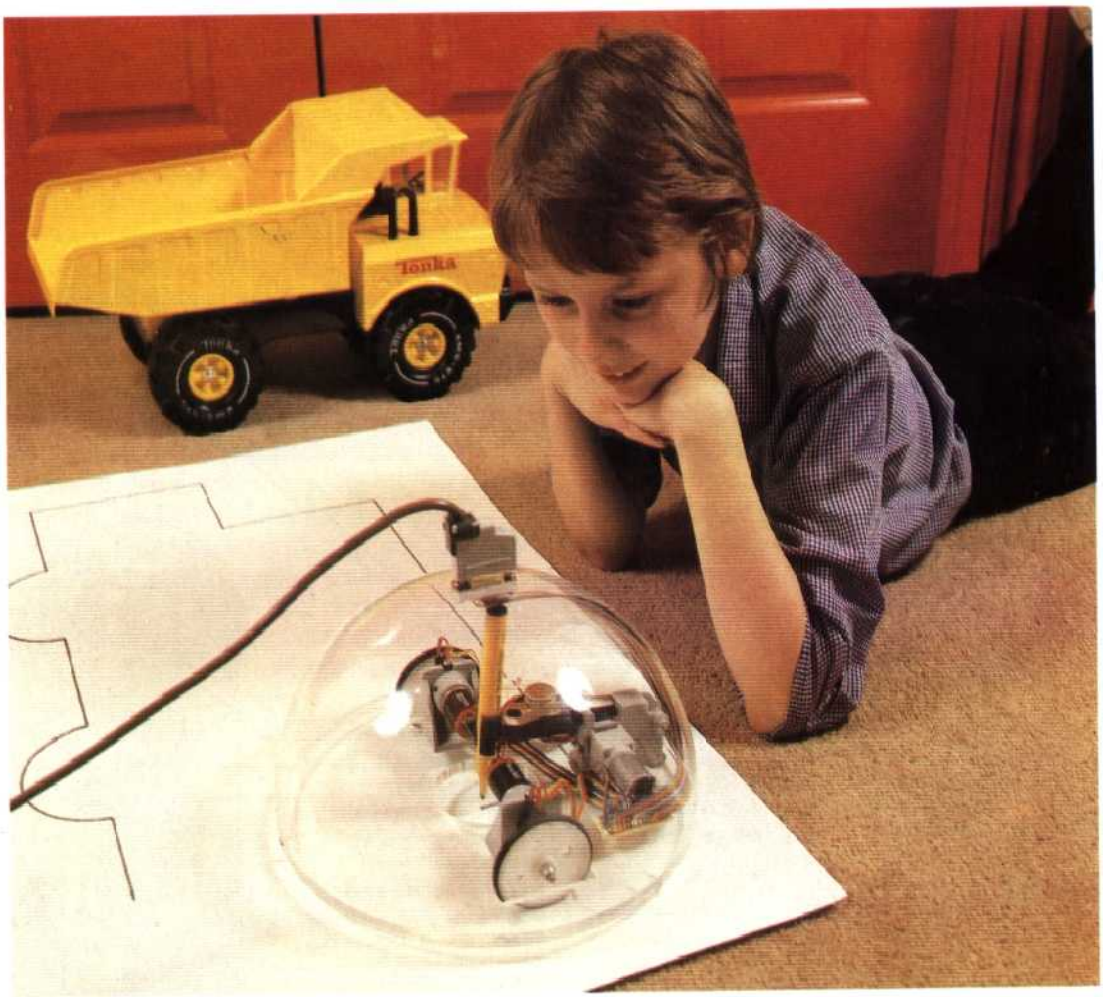
The Electronic Educator

Even the youngest members of your family will be keen to use your computer. Here's the best way to start them off



IAN McKINNELL

One of the most powerful computer aids for primary school children is the floor turtle. This robot is attached to a microcomputer and is operated by a program called LOGO. Children can draw with the floor turtle and it is very useful for teaching mathematical concepts such as shape, distance and the relationship between objects. It is also great fun!

Many parents wonder if a home computer would be of benefit to their children. Most know that it is a good idea for teenage children to learn to use computers at home and at school, but can younger children gain anything from computing?

Yes! The answer is decidedly positive, but there are different ways of introducing a child to the concept of computing, and some are better than others.

The British Government, like many governments in developed countries, has decided that children should now use computers in primary schools. The 'Micros in Primary Education' project is costing £9 million and soon every one of Britain's 29,000 primary schools should have at least one micro. Now the teachers have to find out how to use their small amount of computer power properly.

Computers aren't just good at maths. With a good program — and there is a shortage of good programs for children at present — computers can help young children learn music, ballet, geography, foreign languages and, of course, maths-based subjects such as arithmetic and geometry.

There are two main ways in which a computer can be of help to young children. The child can use the computer to explore his or her world, or the computer can act as a teacher, instructing and drilling the child in a variety of educational subjects.

It isn't a good idea to try teaching your six-year-old how to program a computer in BASIC. Before the age of 12, a child can't really grasp the abstract concepts of such a language. Some children can write programs in BASIC at nine or even earlier, but the work of the French child psychologist Jean