

# Out of Control

## Junior Control Insight 2



There's no need for control technology lessons to be a fruitless struggle with a jungle of wires, says Marc Bowen, just as long as you have the right resources...

**O**ften the most experienced, skilled and creative teachers are transformed into quaking technophobes with the mere mention of 'control technology'. As an experienced ICT Subject Leader, I have spent many hours searching for the Holy Grail of teacher friendly resources for this unit. Anyone trying to promote the development of control skills in the primary phase will understand the value of resources that make the 'control' experience less terrifying for the teacher and, therefore, more rewarding for the learners in their classes.

Historically, control technology has developed a slightly enigmatic reputation due to its niche audience. The most common and complex use of control technology in primary schools has often been found in Year 5/6 classes, frequently led by

the ICT Subject Leader – possibly the only person on the staff who has been brave enough (or should that be foolish enough?) to do battle with the resources. It only takes one bad experience with an erratic roamer, one-on-one combat with a tangle of wires or reading an on-screen procedure in a seemingly ancient and long dead language to scar a teacher's mind with the potential horrors of control in the classroom.

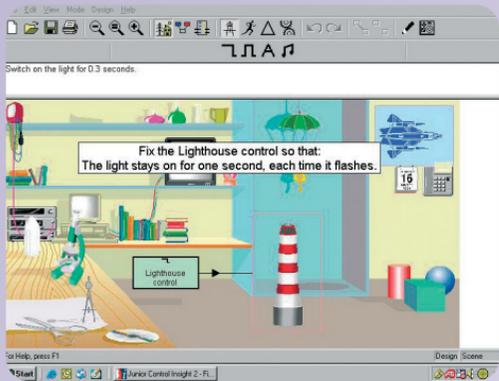
Fortunately, many software and hardware producers are finally hearing the screams of teachers around the country, producing resources that will instead make staff sing with joy!

I have had the pleasure - yes, I said pleasure - of trialling four different resources, all of which have much to offer the primary school in search of effective control technology.

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The popularity of on-screen control programs may have suffered in the past, as the software can often lack the hands-on appeal of roamers and the user interfaces can sometimes be obscure to say the least. However, Logotron's Junior Control Insight has done much to overcome the problems with this area of the control technology market.

Teachers can be easily deterred from exploiting the full potential of on-screen control software as it may be unfamiliar and used infrequently across the curriculum. Junior Control Insight addresses these problems with an intuitive interface. It has done away with the usual array of command boxes and instructional symbols, opting instead for simple input and output devices, which are then brought to life by the wonderful 'insight' module. It is incredibly simple to select your input (a push button for example), linking this to your output (a fan) via the insight module. That's where the magic happens. At the very simplest level, the insight module makes a decision about what you



are trying to achieve by comparing your input and output – you have a push button input and a fan output, so you must want to turn the fan on by using the push button. It's that simple. Drag the three boxes onto the screen, link them, and you have on screen control of a device.

Beyond this is an array of settings that can be adapted to achieve different results, i.e. changing timings, adjusting the operation of the outputs, changing the conditions under which the device operates etc.

Something which I found of great help with my lower ability children was the option to either view their instructions in a schematic 'design mode', where each component is represented by a symbol, or in a 'real-life' display which shows the



components as they would appear in reality. Being able to push the button, rather than just run the program, made the whole process more 'real' and applicable to some children.

Another strength of Junior Control Insight is the way in which it bridges the gap between on-screen control and practical control hardware. When you have generated a program within the software, there is an option to view instructions on how to configure an input/output control box. The software will accurately show you how to connect your device to the correct input and output sockets on a control box, ensuring that it can be controlled using your on-screen program. Again, this removes the terror teachers can sometimes feel when confronted with a tangle of wires which they are expected to

## Why not try...

The software comes with an excellent bank of challenges, which can be set for the children to solve. These can also be differentiated, taking children from simple designing to experimenting with variables and adjusting settings. One scenario my class really enjoyed was the Haunted House. The children are set the challenge of exploring the Haunted House scene, discovering what 'scary' events take place and then how they can adapt and add to these to make the experience more frightening. This included adding flashes of lightning, making ghosts appear and disappear.

connect to bring their pupil's lovingly created models to life.

Using this software, the teacher will no longer have to deal with their disappointed and disheartened children who have toiled to build a buggy, only for it to sit lifelessly on the desktop when it can't communicate with the computer. In addition, Junior Control Insight addresses the needs of different school settings as it is compatible with many forms of control hardware, including Logotron's own traffic light and clown models, as well as systems such as the Lego Mindstorms RCX control module. I would certainly recommend this program to any teachers who have developed a loathing for unreliable and confusing control software and control boxes.