

## PRODUCT REVIEW

**Product:** MicroWorlds EX by *Logo Computer Systems*

- [www.microworlds.com](http://www.microworlds.com)
- Cost = \$99 (Set) to \$1400 (Site License)

**Description:** MicroWorlds EX is a “collection of tools” designed to help children develop creativity as well as critical thinking and problem solving skills. It allows students to “explore and test their ideas” in a simulated environment. The product claims to have applications in science, mathematics, and language arts instruction. MicroWorlds EX is the latest version in a line of products extending back to 1981.

**Important Features and Functionality:** MicroWorlds EX boasts several improvements over earlier versions. It has integrated “Help” features including pop-up tooltips for items on the toolbar as well as a Teacher’s Guide. The “Turtles” used in the program now have a “backpack” which allows them to carry their programming information and items with them as they move around the screen. The program also supports multimedia integration.

**Strengths:** MicroWorlds EX certainly lives up to its claim of being a tool to develop critical thinking and problem solving. It would be a great way to introduce students to computer programming because they have to give the “turtles” commands to get them to do what they want them to do. It is also very versatile in many subject areas allowing for the exploration of probability, geometry, positive and negative integers, physics, estimation, mass and volume, music, art, etc. Students would enjoy the hands on approach and being able to immediately see the effects of their manipulations on the simulated environment.

**Limitations:** Unfortunately, I see a great many limitations to MicroWorlds EX. I only used the demo version for a few hours and I found myself becoming very frustrated with it. I am a proficient computer user yet I struggled with the program. I was able to experiment with a few aspects, but most of the functionality was just too complicated. While the graphics seems to be targeted toward the middle grades, the programming language would be enough to challenge many college students. Many of my students in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades would become so frustrated that they would hate the experience. Personally, I can see the benefits of the software, but I wouldn’t want to learn it. MicroWorlds EX would be one of those programs that an administrator would purchase because the sales pitch sounds great, but would go unused by teachers because of the steep learning curve required.

**Summary and Recommendations:** Without a lot of training and a fairly deep understanding of the program, it would be difficult for teachers to see classroom applications for this software. Perhaps if the program highlighted some more easy to use aspects while leaving the advanced functions relatively hidden, it would not be so intimidating.