



Computer-Based Assessment and Instruction: Do They Make the Grade?

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As the digital age remakes almost all aspects of society, including K-12 public school education, it is no wonder that computer-based assessments and instruction are beginning to make inroads into the classroom, where paper-based approaches have held sway for generations. Some computer-based assessment and instruction innovations, mainly focusing on reading and math, have already taken root and have been well-received by educators, as well as parents. Other approaches and tools are emerging from the development stage. Although the U.S. public school classroom, which has generally been reluctant to embrace technology-based appraisal and teaching tools, has evidenced enthusiasm for these technology-based innovations, questions remain about the value of the tools to both general and special education students.

This issue of FCTD News and Notes examines computer-based assessment and instruction from the perspective of individuals who are responsible for creating and administering several such programs for an expanding public school user base.

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Mel Lee and Michael Kasloff Speak

Mel Lee and Michael Kasloff arrived at their current executive posts at Wireless Generation, a Brooklyn, NY based educational technology company, from unlikely directions.

Mr. Lee, Wireless Generation's Director of Assessment, began his technology career as a contractor for the U.S. military. However, he says, "I believed I could make better use of my skills, so I joined the Peace Corps." While with the Peace Corps, he spent two years in Ghana, teaching high school and participating in initiatives such as the USAID/Quality Improvement in Primary Schools program and providing training to district monitoring and evaluation teams. He also managed Peace Corps partnership projects, including one that resulted in the construction of the first computer facility in a Ghanaian school district. For his efforts, Mr. Lee was named first runner-up in the Foreign Education Volunteer of the Year in recognition of his activities in Ghana. Mr. Lee received B.S. and M.S. degrees from UCLA and an M.B.A from the Fuqua School of Business at Duke University.

Mr. Kasloff, Wireless Generation's Director of Curriculum and Instruction, spent 10 years in the New York City public schools as a middle school math teacher and, most recently, as an administrator. He was director of operations for NEST+m (New Explorations into Science, Technology and Math), the first K-12 public school in New York. Earlier, Mr. Lee was a member of the NEST+m design team tasked by New York City Schools Chancellor Harold Levy (2000-2002) with the creation of a K-12 model for the city's sprawling school system. During his long stint with the New York public schools, Mr.

Lee became aware of Wireless Generation's efforts with hand-held assessment and instruction technology. "That was the first time there appeared to be a way I could use technology meaningfully in my school's classrooms, because until then I had seen technology implemented so poorly there," he recalls. Mr. Kasloff holds a Masters in Education from New York's Bank Street College of Education and dual degrees in business management and computer science from the University of Pennsylvania.

Supporting our interview with Mr. Lee and Mr. Kasloff are resources related to computer-based assessment and instruction. We also feature members of our Knowledge Network. The members spotlighted this month focus on computer-based classroom assessment and instruction as well as education technology in general. We invite you to contact these members for further information.

Please share this newsletter with other organizations, families and professionals who may benefit from it. We invite you to visit us at <http://www.fctd.info>. We welcome feedback, new members and all who contribute to our growing knowledge base.

Computer-Based Assessment and Instruction: Technology for Teaching and Learning

*An Interview with Wireless Generation's
Mel Lee, Director of Assessment and
Michael Kasloff,
Director of Curriculum and Instruction*



Mel Lee



Michael Kasloff

Mel Lee and Michael Kasloff share a passion for finding ways to help teachers and students to be successful. It was that passion that drew them to Wireless Generation. This Brooklyn, NY-based company was founded nine years ago by two Rhodes Scholars, Larry Berger and Greg Gunn, who believed that technology could help educators to improve teaching and learning. Mr. Lee and Mr. Kasloff were particularly attracted by the founders' philosophy of immersion in the workings of schools and current education research in order to develop technology solutions that support teachers in providing effective instruction.

"Larry and Greg started Wireless Generation after having watched schools purchase a lot of education technology products that sat in boxes, gathering dust because they were hard for teachers to use, or didn't address ac-

tual challenges," says Mr. Kasloff. "They believe that technology does have a place in schools, but that providers have an obligation to develop products and services that reflect a deep and accurate understanding of how teaching and learning actually happen."

Computer-Based Assessment

Schools use a variety of assessments to measure student achievement. These range from formative measures given during the school year to gauge student progress and diagnose learning needs, to summative end of year tests. Wireless Generation has brought a particular focus to the former. For years, teachers have relied upon formative assessments to provide insight into students' development, particularly in the early elementary years when children are building foundational skills for more advanced learning.

In grades K-6, formative assessment is observational and done one-on-one. Teachers assess at the beginning, middle, and end of year to collect benchmark scores that reveal how students are progressing toward learning key skills. Teachers also do what is known as "progress monitoring assessments" in between the benchmark administrations to gather additional information about each student's strengths and needs. According to Mr. Lee, the Wireless Generation co-founders watched teachers give these assessments in elementary classrooms, juggling stopwatches, papers, pencils and other materials, then completing the copious paperwork involved in scoring, recording, and analyzing the data. The paper reports generally wound up in filing cabinets, snapshots of student learning no longer considered in making instructional decisions.

"Technology has clearly brought great efficiency to other professional fields," says Mr. Lee. "Technology-based formative assessments could make the entire process much less burdensome for teachers, and much more valuable."

wireless generation®



Technology has made formative assessment easier, more efficient, and more valuable in the instructional process. Here a teacher uses mCLASS software to record a student's reading behaviors on a handheld. Results are available immediately, along with analysis and instructional recommendations.

Working closely with university researchers and authors of common early reading and math formative assessments, Wireless Generation developed mCLASS software, which enables teachers to give the assessments more easily, efficiently, and accurately with a handheld device. While students use paper-based materials to do math and reading tasks, teachers record their responses and behaviors directly on the handheld. Because timing is automated, teachers can focus on students rather than administration protocols. Scoring is also automated and occurs immediately, giving teachers real-time information about students' needs. Teachers "sync" their handheld devices to computers, and student data is uploaded to a secure Web site, where they, as well as principals and administrators, can view a range of different kinds of reports for

analysis and instructional planning. Administrators have access to aggregate reports and can pull out data for virtually any student subpopulation, determining how to best meet their particular needs.

Teachers use mCLASS software to give a range of formative assessments including DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills), developed by researchers at the University of Oregon, and the TPRI, developed by researchers at the University of Texas Center for Academic and Reading Skills, and at the Texas Institute for Measurement, Evaluation and Statistics at the University of Houston. Formative assessments for English language learners are also supported. Universal design principles vary, with the assessment authors providing guidance on whether the measures are appropriate for some or all students (ie, http://www.dibels.org/papers/Appropriateness_0207.pdf).

"Teachers became big fans of the software, especially those who had been using paper and pencil for a long time, because it cuts the assessment time in half," says Mr. Lee. "We can return that time to the classroom, which is great."

Lee continues, "Because formative assessment is meant to help teachers understand what instruction they should be providing to which students and when, the software had to do more than just save time. We've been fortunate to work closely with many schools and districts, and their feedback pointed the way to where technology could provide the greatest value in linking assessment and instruction."

What followed were new technology tools

and features for teachers to move from data to action. "Teachers would say, 'I have my data, but now what?', so the Now What? tools are designed to help answer that question," says Lee. "We have a Web report that lets teachers review students' answers during a particular task; the accompanying Item-Level Advisor tool highlights and explains the significant errors and response patterns right on that report. Small Group Advisor is an instructional planning tool that the teacher uses to put her students into small groups according to what the data reveals about their shared needs, so that she can follow up with the right instruction for the right kids."

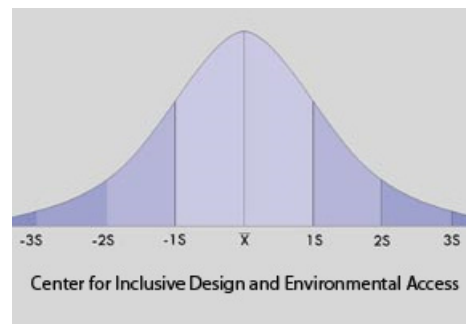
Similar support tools were introduced on the handheld device. The "Act" feature recommends instructional activities for individual students based upon their assessment results. mCLASS:Math guides the teacher through the process of diagnostically interviewing a student to probe his skills and strategies more deeply, and use the findings to make instructional decisions.

"We recognize that every interaction a teacher has with software or other technology is an opportunity for professional development," notes Mr. Kasloff.

The mCLASS Web reports, for example, "avoid the familiar two-dimensional, flat approach to spitting out numbers and data for teachers. From the beginning, we have paired data with guidance, which helps the teacher to deepen her professional knowledge and skills in working with data."

Coping with the Bell Curve

In a class in which the bulk of the students are in the bell curve of grade-appropriate math, a much smaller



percentage may need remediation because they are at least a year behind their grade in math, and a similar-sized group may be above grade level. Are these computer-based programs effective for all three groups?

Replies Mel Lee: "The mCLASS reports color-code students by strengths and needs. Teachers can use tools such as the Small Group Advisor to plan instruction for each group: grade-level and above, at some risk, and at highest risk."

Many schools use technology-based assessment in their Response to Intervention (RTI) programs. "Teachers can do this kind of technology-based assessment more frequently. The progress of at-risk students can be monitored as often as every 1-2 weeks. These checks are incredibly important so that classroom time is maximized – if a particular intervention isn't working for a struggling student, teachers know to change it." Lee has spearheaded the development of a special version of mCLASS for RTI that allows general education teachers and special education staff to capture and share not just data, but also the specific interventions given, and for how long, the multi-

dimensional tracking that is characteristic of formal RTI implementations.

Computer-Based Instruction with a Teacher at the Center

A student seated in front of a computer clicking and listening to an unseen instructor via headphones is a familiar image. When Wireless Generation developed its Burst:Reading technology-powered



intervention for grades k-3, it decided that the teacher had to remain at the center of the action. "Having the teacher deliver the instruction, and engage and inspire students is particularly important when you are intervening in the early grades," says Mr. Kasloff. "We recognized that technology could help every

Download Burst Instruction

Download Burst #1 (created Feb. 3) Focus: **Phonological Awareness, Letter Sounds**

▼ Why this Burst?
These students are grouped because they have similar instructional needs. This 2-week instructional plan has been tailored to meet their precise needs.

SNAPSHOT WHEN BURST WAS CREATED on Feb 3

Students	Phonol. Aware	Letter Sounds	Blending	Reg. Words	Irreg. Words
Cote, Barrett	At or Above Expectation	At or Above Expectation	At or Above Expectation	At or Above Expectation	At or Above Expectation
Delaney, Alexis	At or Above Expectation	At or Above Expectation	At or Above Expectation	At or Above Expectation	At or Above Expectation
Edwards, Austin	At or Above Expectation	At or Above Expectation	At or Above Expectation	At or Above Expectation	At or Above Expectation
Michelson, Shawn	At or Above Expectation	At or Above Expectation	At or Above Expectation	At or Above Expectation	At or Above Expectation

Key:
 Far Below Expectation
 Below Expectation
 At or Above Expectation

New technology has been developed to support teachers in giving the right instruction to their students every day, based upon learning needs. For example, Burst:Reading analyzes students' formative assessment data, groups students with shared needs, and sends the teacher a 10-day sequence of lessons for her to deliver to each group. The teacher adjusts groups and lessons as she sees fit.

teacher to be adept at differentiating instruction for their students, with all of their varied needs, but as in our approach to assessment, technology is a support, not a replacement."

Burst:Reading is distinct from other paper-based and computer-based programs because it is embedded with new, patent-pending technology that matches curriculum to students' needs based upon past and current assessment data. "This was a logical extension of our work in the formative assessment area," says Mr. Kasloff.

The technology applies an algorithm that analyzes the data, groups students in the class who share needs, and creates a customized 10-day sequence of lessons at the right pace and intensity for each group. The teacher downloads the lessons, teaches for 10 days, and re-assesses her at-risk students. The whole process then repeats with the new assessment data informing the analysis, grouping, and selection of lessons.

"It takes many hours outside of class time for a teacher to analyze data for each student, create groups for follow-up instruction, and then cull through instructional materials to find the right lessons for each day. Even the most accomplished, dedicated teachers can find it challenging," says Mr. Kasloff. "This is another great example of how technology, when applied appropriately to classroom activities and with respect for the unique, human characteristics of teaching and learning, can help to make instruction more effective."

Flexible Instructional Content

“One of the great benefits of computer-based instructional materials is that they are easily updated or modified to meet students' needs. Traditional printed textbooks are updated only every 5-7 years,” says Mr. Kasloff. “Computer-based programs are far more flexible and conducive to tailoring instruction to the needs of the individual learner than having a teacher take an entire class of 25 kids through a textbook in lockstep, regardless of where each child may be in his development.”



Universal design principles are kept in mind. The content of the Burst:Reading lessons is always multi-modal. For example, a sub-skill in literacy is the ability of students to distinguish sound and language. The skill can be taught using a physical manipulative employing rhymes and poems, movement of the body, in some cases even using a hand-puppet that simulates generation of language. The lesson includes these different modalities with the goal of meeting students where they are. Additional modalities can be added if necessary.

Cultural relevance is also considered, and content can be instantly tweaked. “In terms of cultural relevance, our goal is to help teach students various ways to comprehend text,” Mr. Kasloff remarks. “This has become an increasingly sophisticated effort using a carefully crafted set of stories. To get to the approximately 10 stories needed for a specific instruction strand, we will produce approxi-

mately 40 stories around different themes and topics, and field test them broadly until we find the stories that have the most cultural relevance for students.”

Computer-Based Programs in the Home

Mr. Lee explains that Wireless Generation's assessment offerings, with one exception, are not designed for in-home use. But to involve parents in their child's education, many school districts using mCLASS assessment software also subscribe to a feature called Home Connect. After each benchmark assessment, the teacher sends a letter home to each child's parent or guardian, explaining the assessment results in clear, easy-to-understand language and suggesting learning activities to do at home. Many teachers also use the Home Connect letters as part of parent-teacher conferences. The letters can be written in multiple languages.



For parents or guardians who want instructional content for use at home, Mr. Kasloff recommends FreeReading.net, a free open source reading intervention program also launched by Wireless Generation with an advisory board of leading reading researchers. Burst:Reading draws upon content from FreeReading.net to generate lessons.

“FreeReading.net is a great resource to use at home,” says Mr. Kasloff. “It's a research-based program that is constantly being improved and enhanced through the contributions of

many thousands of teachers and researchers around the world. There is also a complete, sequenced curriculum on the site called Intervention A, also available for free."

The Last Word

"Traditionally, K-12 education has been slower to embrace technology than other industries and areas of society. Nevertheless, we have found that if the technology is designed well for the tasks at hand, educators at all levels of technology engagement, from infrequent users to experts find it easy to use and beneficial," says Mr. Lee.



AT Success Stories

We have a feature on our website called "AT Success Stories." Our success stories highlight a child or teenager who is using some form of assistive technology. Through this feature, we hope to share with the world the achievements of many young people with disabilities and how their successes were aided with assistive technology.

We are currently looking for children to participate in this feature. If you have or know of a child/teen who has experienced success through the use of assistive technology and who would like to be featured, please contact us at fctd@aed.org

RESOURCES

Articles

Technology Key to Analyzing Assessment Data: Incorporating Assessments into Daily Instruction Builds Solid Base for Formative Assessment

By Laura Devaney

eSchool News (October 2008)

Ms. Devaney extols the value of carefully applied technology-based classroom assessments in improving instruction. While noting that states should develop longitudinal data systems to better analyze student performance, she cautions that technology alone is not a solution. Adequate teacher training, IT support and strong leadership are also essential in ensuring that data analysis drives instruction at the school, district and state levels. "More personalized testing, without increasing the number or frequency of tests, can have a positive impact on assessing standardized testing requirements," she concludes.

<http://www.eschoolnews.com/resources/universal-response-to-intervention/universal-response-to-intervention-articles/index.cfm?rc=1&i=55648>

Applying Principles of Universal Design to Test Delivery: The Effect of Computer-based Read-aloud on Test Performance of High School Students with Learning Disabilities

By R.P. Dolan, T.E. Hall, M. Banagree, N. Strangman Carolyn and Peter Lynch School of Education at Boston College (2005)

According to the authors, the large-scale assessment mandated by federal initiatives such as IDEA and NCLB remain inadequate

to reliably and validly test students with disabilities. The problem, the authors write, is that students' disabilities rather than their abilities are measured, which the authors refer to as "construct irrelevant testing." In order to address the problem, IDEA requires that students with disabilities have testing accommodations in place. For students with learning disabilities, having a test read aloud is a common accommodation. The test is often read by a teacher or aide, or less frequently by a tape recorder or computer using text to speech (CBT-TTS) software.

This article reports the findings of a pilot study investigating whether computer-based testing with text-to-speech (CBT-TTS) is an effective approach for providing individualized support to students with learning disabilities. Participants in the study were students grades 9-12 identified by resource room teachers. Students were tested on equivalent forms of a test using CBT-TTS technology and paper and pencil testing (PPT).

The testing procedure, data collection and data analysis are described in detail in the article. Results indicated that students performed significantly higher when responding to items related to longer passages when using the CBT-TTS than PPT. Students also reported positive impressions of the CBT-TTS accommodations. Overall the study indicates that "providing computer based read-aloud support to high school students with learning disabilities can improve their performance in a multiple choice United State history and civics test."

<http://escholarship.bc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1058&context=jtla>

Technology-Based Assessments Improve Teaching and Learning

State Education Directors Association (October 2008)

Prepared as part of SETDA's Class of 2020 Action Plan for Education, this report advocates creating smart database and assessment systems using technology to analyze each student's progress "in a timely, personal and relevant manner." The report insists that if done with interoperability and alignment in mind, student data can be generalized and privatized for use in state systems to inform education policy. The report urges the implementation of microassessments of all students, a process, the report's authors claim, that will provide opportunities for remediation or enrichment for all students, including those with special needs. Such a system of microassessments, they add, is possible only with intensified teacher training and IT support to ensure that reports delivered to teachers are timely and relevant. The paper highlights innovative approaches via differentiated instruction. The authors do not advocate additional high-stakes tests and instead suggest that using technology to assess students in a less formalized more personalized manner may produce results that are more beneficial for students and teachers.

http://www.setda.org/c/document_library/get_file?folderId=270&name=DLFE-261.pdf

Middle Schools Adopt Gaming in Response-to-Intervention Strategies

By Dave Nagel

T.H.E. Journal (April 2009)

The author describes the use of gaming in response-to-intervention (RTI) programs by

three middle schools in the Garland (TX) Independent School District. The schools adopted an immersive gaming program in February 2009 to provide support to academically and economically struggling students who are having difficulty with math. The immersive gaming environment, which focuses on algebra and pre-algebra, offers a 3-D format where players carry out missions (lessons) in multi-player tournament-style games. Players confront mathematical obstacles, which, when overcome, allow the players to advance and to accumulate points. The game is being used as part of the early intervention strategy based on teachers' observations of students, test scores and other factors. Garland ISD includes more than 57,000 students in two pre-schools, 47 elementary schools, 13 middle schools and seven high schools.

<http://www.thejournal.com/articles/24225>

Response-to-Intervention: Is There a Role for Assistive Technology?

By Dave L. Edyburn

Special Education Technology Practice (January/February 2009)

According to Dr. Edyburn, a noted assistive technology authority, RTI advocates typically have little experience with technology. As a result, he asserts, technology is not routinely considered to be an essential tool when designing solutions for struggling students. He urges technology advocates to be aggressive in ensuring that technology tools are considered part of such solutions. Technology developers, he adds, need to become much more committed to creating products that collect data on student performance and

generate reports that clearly communicate student progress. To that end, he writes, some forms of AT appear necessary outside of the RTI model.

http://www.cesa1.k12.wi.us/cms_files/resources/EdyburnHandout.pdf

Websites

Interactivate

Shodor (2008)

Shodor is a non-profit research and education organization dedicated to the advancement of science and math education, specifically through the use of modeling and simulation technologies. Interactivate is free web-based software that has online courseware for exploration in science and math. It is comprised of activities, lessons, and discussions. The website is very easy to navigate, with specific instructions on how to use the site and to find specific lessons or activities that correlate with state standards.

<http://www.shodor.org/interactivate/>

Blogs

Response to Intervention, Universal Design for Learning: Resources for Implementation

TechPsych (January 20, 2008)

The Techpsych blog offers an audio description of how response-to-intervention can be implemented via a UDL approach. The audio file is aimed at teachers, school psychologists and speech/language therapists. According to this blog, most schools that have adopted RTI use a team problem-solving approach that features a three-tiered model of prevention and intervention for all students, including students with special needs. Although RTI was initially designed to support students with

academic difficulties, the approach also is effective with schoolwide positive behavior support efforts, the blog author claims.

<http://techpsych.blogspot.com/2008/01/response-to-intervention-universal.html>

There is still time to register for the FCTD 2009 Institute on Assistive and Instructional Technology!

The Institute will take place
July 20-31, 2009

This year's topics include:
Social Media Tools & Accessible Instructional Materials

- Earn continuing education units (CEUs)
- Expand your knowledge of technology devices and services

The FCTD Institute is offered entirely online, so that you can participate when and where it is most convenient for you. The Institute web site will be available 24/7 for you to read and post questions and comments. Discussion moderators will check in several times a day to post their comments and to respond to participant questions.

We look forward to your participation.

For more information or to register, visit
http://www.fctd.info/registration_types/1/registrations/new

KNOWLEDGE NETWORK MEMBERS

State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA)

Founded in 2001, the organization is the principal association



representing the state directors for educational technology. SETDA membership includes ed tech directors and staff from state education departments of 50 states, the District of Columbia and American Samoa. For more information, contact:

State Educational Technology Directors Association

P.O. Box 10

Glen Burnie, MD 21060

Phone: (410) 647-6965

Contact: Mary Ann Wolf, Executive Director

<http://www.setda.org/web/guest/home>

Center on Teaching and Learning (CTL) – University of Oregon

Part of the University of Oregon's College of Education, the center is a network of inclusive learning communities, undergrad and graduate students. Graduates become teachers, administrators, clinicians, social service professionals and educational research scientists. CTL research faculty and grad students collaborate with school districts and agency partners. In addition to academic programs, the center includes an alliance of nationally prominent organizations, institutes and affiliated research and outreach units.



CTL produces DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills), a well-known nationally normed early reading assessment. DIBELS are a set of procedures and measures for assessing the acquisition of early literacy skills K-6. They are designed to be one-minute fluency measures used to regularly monitor development of early literacy and reading skills. DIBELS was developed to measure recognized and empirically validated skills related to outcomes. Each measure has been thoroughly researched and demonstrated to be reliable and valid indicators of early literacy development and predictive of later reading proficiency to aid in the early identification of students who are not progressing as expected. For further information, contact:
Center on Teaching and Learning
5292 University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403-5292
Phone: (541) 346-1644
Fax: (541) 346-4349
Contact: Edward Kame'enui, Ph.D., Director
ekamee@uoregon.edu
<https://dibels.uoregon.edu/>
<http://education.uoregon.edu/degree.htm?id=73>

Monterey Institute for Technology and Education

The Monterey Institute for Technology and Education is an educational non-profit organization committed to improving access to education. MITE (pronounced "mighty") manages a range of projects from establishing systems for the development and distribution of open educational content



to efficacy studies and other educational research. Two of MITE's projects are the National Repository of Online Courses and the MacArthur Series on Digital Media and Learning.

The National Repository of Online Courses (NROC) project supports the development and distribution of high-quality online courses to a worldwide audience. The goal of this project is to facilitate collaboration among a community of developers to create a library of online courses that are available to everyone.

The goal of the MacArthur Series on Digital Media and Learning is to support discourse and help build an emerging field of study. The project publishes the Journal of Digital Media and Learning with MIT Press.

For more information, contact:
The Monterey Institute for Technology and Education
3 Beach Way
Monterey, CA 93940
831-642-9459 831-642-0243 (fax)
info@montereyinstitute.org
<http://www.montereyinstitute.org/>

EdTech Associates

EdTech Associates offers AT consulting services to help parents, individuals and schools select and use available technologies designed to support children with learning disabilities via AT evaluations and training services. AT evaluation includes an initial consultation with parents, a review of records, an on-site consultation and observations, an evaluation session



with the student, a follow-up appointment to review findings and recommendations, a written report completed within four weeks of the evaluation session and personalized training on application software and AT tools for students and/or parents. For additional information, contact:

EdTech Associates
4 Arrow Lane
Amherst, NH 03031
Phone: (603) 424-4534 Fax: (603) 424-8599
Contact: Kathleen McClaskey
Email: khm@edtech-associates.com
<http://www.edtech-associates.com>

University of Texas Health Science Center's Children's Learning Institute (CLI): TPRI

The institute combines data and studies from psychology, neuro-development, education and child development to provide solutions derived from, and supported by, documented research. CLI services include clinical assessment, diagnosis and treatment of learning disorders and research on techniques to enhance a child's home and learning environment. The institute staff includes experts in child development, education, medicine, neuro-development and research analysis.



CLI is home to the Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI), a valid and reliable assessment tool that provides a comprehensive picture of K-3 students' reading proficiency. At each grade level the TPRI consists of a screening and an inventory. The screen permits the rapid assessment of individual students.

Designations of risk status are yielded, which identify students who likely do not require additional assessment. The inventory is a detailed assessment of reading and reading-related skills that allows the teacher to gain more in-depth information that can be used to determine a child's level of risk for reading problems. The screen and inventory, which help the teacher set learning objectives for each student, are individually administered and are designed to be given by a trained teacher. For more information, contact:

Children's Learning Institute
7000 Fannin, Suite 2300 Houston, TX 77030
Phone: (713) 500-3709 Fax: (713) 500-3705
<http://www.childrenslearninginstitute.org/our-programs/program-overview/TPRI/default.html>
<http://www.childrenslearninginstitute.org/>

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Project Director: Jacqueline Hess
Newsletter Editor: Thomas H. Allen
Design and Distribution: Ana-Maria Gutierrez



Family Center on Technology and Disability
1825 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20009
Phone 202-884-8068 Fax (202) 884-8441
fctd@aed.org www.fctd.info