Children's Literacy Initiative's Message Time™ CD-ROM

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Children's Literacy Initiative (CLI) is a non-profit organization dedicated to ensuring that children living in high-poverty areas have the best possible opportunity to become successful at reading. Children's Literacy Initiative’s goal is to prevent the need for remediation by helping children who are perceived to be educationally “at risk” achieve at national norms on literacy assessments. CLI's programs address many of the causes of reading difficulties in the early grades, which very often lead to continued school failure, and ultimately to economic disadvantages. CLI has served public school and Head Start teachers nationally, with a focus on the eastern states. Large-scale projects include Baltimore City Public Schools, the Philadelphia School District, Newark Public Schools, and the Camden Board of Education, with other projects in Los Angeles, New York City, Washington D.C., and Pittsburgh. Through years of work in entire school districts and with the community of teachers within individual schools, CLI has established itself as an effective professional development model.

CLI's approach is to provide primary teachers (pre-Kindergarten through 3rd grade) with intensive training in proven literacy instruction practices. CLI coaches, mostly teachers themselves, work with new and veteran teachers in their classrooms assisting them to the level of mastery in these practices. Moreover, essential to CLI’s working with teachers in low-income, under-resourced areas, is its commitment to setting up individual classroom libraries, as well as home lending libraries, and provides other literacy supplies such as individual student writing boxes equipped with a myriad of fun and essential writing tools.

As CLI develops and addresses new demands in primary education for the 21st century, its mission is expanding to reach an ever growing population of new teachers who are replacing the thousands heading for retirement. With the hopes to train larger numbers of teachers in effective instructional strategies, CLI has adapted the use of CD-ROM technology to its program. As an alternative to its intensive training component, CLI will be providing shorter training sessions on one of its instructional strategies and supplying teachers with a CD-ROM to give them a thorough demonstration of an effective method in teaching writing skills. By taking advantage of the multimedia format, teachers will be able to view multiple video, audio and graphical samples that will provide them essential supportive illustrations and information.

By using CD-ROM technology, CLI has reformatted one of its central training models, namely, the use of video demonstrations and text support into a more dynamic and interactive medium giving teachers opportunities for multiple viewings and personalized engagements. CLI plans to use this format as a supplemental as well as an alternative training program offered to schools throughout the country and to those not able to purchase the entire CLI training package.

CLI hired twentyone xdesign (http://www.21xdesign.com) to develop a CD-ROM that would demonstrate the step by step procedure for conducting a daily writing lesson called Message Time™. Developed by Dr. Janice Stewart of Caldwell College in New Jersey, Message Time™ is a basic instructional approach which explicitly models the writing process to primary students learning the initial skills in literacy. Message Time™ is not a direct-instruction approach, nor is it a script for teachers to follow. Rather, it is a simple approach to writing which allows early learners to first comprehend that writing is a process of communication. Message Time™ increases children's knowledge of print conventions such as differentiating between words and letters and punctuation. It also acquaints children with written language in a meaningful context and provides opportunities for children to respond at their own level of reading and writing comprehension.

The SITE conference offers CLI an optimal platform to launch a debut of its CD-ROM to the education community and interact with colleagues who have also developed technology-based educational formats. CLI is interested in demonstrating its CD-ROM to educators who can use it as well as to those who can offer critiques and suggestions of its use. During a two hour poster session, CLI will offer demonstrations of it software, displays of images from the CD-ROM and pamphlets about the product and about the CLI program in general. A raffle of free CD-ROMs will also be offered during this time.