

EDUCATION WEEK

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POWERING UP Mobile learning seeks the spotlight in K-12 education

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Tech Tool Targets Elementary Readers

A Game Boy-like device now being used by 40,000 students in 15 states aims to improve the reading skills of K-2 students.

By **Katie Ash**

Much attention has been paid to how mobile-learning devices can be incorporated into middle and high schools, but Seth Weinberger is targeting a different set of students: kindergartners through 2nd graders.

"The sweet spot of literacy is kindergarten to 2nd grade," says Weinberger, the executive director of Innovations for Learning, the Evanston, Ill.-based nonprofit organization that developed a mobile-learning device called the TeacherMate. "If you get them [reading on grade level] early, there's a real chance that you can keep them at grade level."

TeacherMates are now being used by more than 40,000 students in 15 states, says Weinberger, and there are plans to adapt the TeacherMate software into applications for the iPod touch or iPad. And the decision to target the devices at elementary youngsters has attracted the attention of ed-tech researchers, some of whom say the elementary grades are where such devices could have their greatest impact on improving reading skills.

Cathleen A. Norris, a professor of learning technologies at the University of North Texas and the chief education architect for the Ann Arbor, Mich.-based company GoKnow, which provides educational technology, software, and curriculum to K-12 schools, says that "what you must do is catch [the students] at the early grades and make them successful. When children are experiencing success in early grades, they spend more time with [the subject]."

On the heels of the One Laptop Per Child initiative, which aims to provide low-cost laptop computers to students in developing countries, Weinberger wanted to create a relatively affordable, easy-to-use mobile-learning device for students in the United States. "Schools are unbelievably strapped for cash," says Weinberger.

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