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New testing system helps detect language problems

The National Research Council of Canada (NRC) and the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario in Ottawa are testing a new computerized system that evaluates children's hearing and language skills.

For some years the council has been involved in a long-range program of research, development and evaluation in the field of computer-aided learning systems, collaborating with teachers and educators in an attempt to gain insight into the range and nature of problems that might be tackled.

Helps professionals

To this end the NRC developed a terminal and related software that could be used by professionals to assess children's language skills. Tests which evaluate such skills as auditory discrimination (how one perceives sound differences), auditory memory, sound blending, sound/symbol relationships, selective attention (auditory

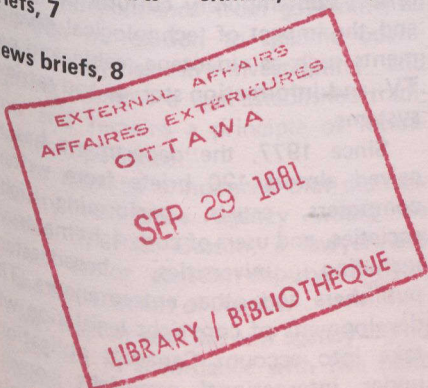
discrimination in a controlled noise environment) are currently administered by hand by trained professionals. It was determined that if these tests could be standardized through automated administration and integrated with a portable terminal, screening programs providing assessment facilities for larger numbers of children could be initiated.

In outlying areas tests could be administered under computer control by trained volunteers or para-professionals, thus increasing access to early evaluation. In addition, practising professionals already functioning under the pressure of long waiting lists for clinical services would have a tool to assist them in utilizing their already limited time more effectively.

The development of a prototype portable terminal for this purpose was undertaken by Lektromedia Limited (now a division of Goodwood Data Systems Limited, Ottawa). The terminal was packaged in



Dr. Elaine Pressman begins auditory discrimination testing with a ten-year-old student. The system incorporates a random access slide projector, a random access audio unit and a touch-sensitive screen device. The terminal is packaged in portable units which can be easily relocated and reassembled.



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