

Searcy, Arkansas

February 2, 2009

Two Thumbs Up for Education

Electronic 'gadget' helps Searcy teacher

By Warren Watkins

Class is in session and the children are at their desks . . . except for that one student reclined on a beanbag in the corner with his thumbs on an electronic gadget.



Logan Glewen learns with the Study Buddy

But wait, he's not sloughing, he's learning. What fifth grader Logan Glewen, 11, calls a "learning video game" is a big hit in the classroom of David Pietzman, who teaches math and science at Southwest Middle School. The device, which looks at first like a Gameboy or other gaming device popular among young people today - a toy forbidden in most classrooms - is the latest way technology and education have interfaced.

The Study Buddy helps students go back over math and science lessons and is like private tutoring, only it doesn't take up Pietzman's time with only one student. While the Study Buddy is reviewing facts with a student, Pietzman can be reviewing a different lesson with another student or class, effectively doubling his efficiency. "It's used for an intervention if the student doesn't 'get it,'" Pietzman said. "We have time at the end of the class when they're looking at problems. The kids that need help can use the Study Buddy." Pietzman said the Study Buddy is just what he needed. "It's very simply built, because it's got 'A-B-C-D' for the four choices," Pietzman said. "If you score below 80 on a test, it lets you watch the lesson again."

Cartridges can be purchased for many age levels. A grant bought the first unit and cartridges, and if Pietzman had \$2,000 he could get a six-pack of units with cartridges, a cost savings from buying in bulk. "They're totally aligned with the Arkansas framework, which is totally amazing," Pietzman said, showing his enthusiasm for teaching.

The 25-year-old, originally from St. Louis, came to Searcy to attend Harding University, graduating in 2006. He married a Searcy girl and is in his third year of teaching. He and his wife, Meredith, are both working on their Masters degrees at Harding. "The benefit of the Study Buddy is that, as we go through things under the "No Child Left Behind" act, I can see if they can't master something, and I can put them on the Study Buddy," Pietzman said.

Hispanic students with low English skills benefit greatly from the device because the voice on the computer is easily understood, a benefit for word problems. The response-to-intervention technique supported by the device fits well in the goals of the school, and the district.

"Another good thing is it gives them a score at the end, and the quicker the feedback the quicker they can see what is wrong," Pietzman said. "They can go right back and see what they did wrong and there is even a button where the lady explains it."

Pietzman records the students' Study Buddy scores. Online tests and quizzes go along with the Study Buddy, and some students can do homework online at the Web site of the same company that makes the device, Brainchild.

The homework is then repeated at school so the student experiences solving the problems with a parent and then again on their own.

“I can even see how long it took a child to do their work online,” Pietzman said.