

The McDowell News

Device improves student's concentration

By Nathan Hall

Staff Writer

Students at Old Fort Elementary School are developing their skills through the use of an interesting device.

The Play Attention program is a computer-based learning system for children who may have trouble paying attention at times.

Children in the program focus on their activities with the aid of a helmet that monitors their brain activity.

Electrodes in the helmet measure brain activity through sensors on top of the head and behind both ears.

The program was developed by Asheville City School system Technologist Peter Freer with technology used by NASA and the U.S. Air Force. Freer is the first person to develop the system for the purpose of education.

"Play Attention gives children the ability to practice paying attention and get instant feedback," Freer said.

The computer activities focus on short-term memory, visual tracking, time on-task, cognitive processing and discriminatory processing. These skills are essential for success in the classroom.

Students start the program at around 7 years of age, and are usually recommended by teachers who have noticed some difficulty focusing in class.

Parent volunteer Barb Rollar, along with teacher assistants Katie Croom and Donna Duncan, are the "coaches" for the Play Attention program.

Students must follow three rules while using the program: move as little as possible, talk only after games are through and stay relaxed and calm.

Teachers at Old Fort Elementary said that progress is apparent in students using the system.

"Students are able to focus better on everyday tasks. There has also been a noticeable improvement in concentration levels and grades in students who have been in the program for a year or more," said Old Fort Elementary School third-grade teacher Natalie Gouge.

"Students with difficulty staying focused and keeping track of schoolwork have made noticeable progress, showed more confidence, interest, and class participation since they have been on the program," said third-grade teacher Bonnie Fisher. "This is a wonderful program, and the Play Attention coaches are excellent. I highly recommend this program."

"We have really jumped into this program with both feet," said Rollar.

The developers of the Play Attention program named Old Fort Elementary as a model school for others using the program.

Nebo, West Marion, and Pleasant Gardens elementary schools also use the Play Attention program.