The I-Pad...Not a VOCA...Not a dedicated Communication Device.

Introduction

My name is Jane Remington-Gurney and I began my career in AAC and CCN at a time when low and high tech were just emerging for people with little or no functional speech. Using I-Tech as AAC is VERY new to me. As an older generation person it’s still scary to meet new technology and have new ways of doing things. I continually experience paradigm shifts as per Chapter 2 of my first book (Don’t you just hate it when people promote themselves 😊)

So far my teachers for the I-Tech have been my 20 year old son, my clients and their families and my colleagues in the US. I currently use an I-Phone and an I-Pad. I have just started to get very anxious when I cannot find my I-Pad and have reached the stage of needing to register it for security with the Me network.

I-Pad

I would not describe the I-Pad as a communication aid. I don’t consider it to be this. What’s more, it was never designed to be such. It’s just another piece of technology.

I consider it to be a tool in my tool box of resources that I need to do and enjoy my job. I’ve attached the list of Apps from the Education Department but please be aware that these things need constantly updating. For example, Talking Tom is great but Talking Carl is better and Talking Larry is even better. There is also a users Guide to the I-Pad which although available in newsagents is also available as an App, so you can read from the I-pad rather than carry book and device. Personally, I love my I-Pad for being able to read novels and text books from I-books. Some of my clients have great interactive books which they have downloaded free from the State Library.

Here are some of the things I would recommend the I-Pad for:

1. An incredible teaching tool
2. A means for self expression
3. A social networking tool
4. A way for developing access
5. A tool for developing cognitive skills such as attention and memory

Let’s look at each of these areas in more detail.
1. **Teaching Tool** – for language. Really, what you have to do is work out what you want to teach or what you want to compliment your teaching and then search for an application for it. For example, it took me a while to search for an emotional thermometer but finally I found one under ‘anxiety’. This Application (App) has a colour coded and text scale of anxiety levels which when you identify individually, links you to strategies to choose to help manage your anxiety. The strategy you select then links you to information about how to go about this. If you just need a stress release that’s not so ‘cognitive; just use the Bubble Wrap app.

Other Applications I use are in the areas of Rhyme, Word Associations, Syntax, Grammar, Voice Recognition, Phonics, Reading, Telling Time, and Pragmatics. Some apps I use are from the ABA sites and many are from the Kindergarten genre.

2. **Self Expression.** Like many Apps, the role of the communication partner or the knowledgeable person when it comes to making equipment work and programming it, is vital. For self expression I am using the Pro-Loquo-2 Go App, Draw, Tap to Talk, and I-Speak. I’ve just programmed Guy Talk as this could be a helpful start up communication tool because as we all know, communication devices have to be taught and experienced and as we probably all suspect – a two week trial of a communication device is close to useless if you don’t have any discourse or programming skills and you are also responsible for a family, a classroom, a job and a life of your own (detect the cynicism?). There is a great App called PAGES which is very similar to a word processing program. This is worth looking at if you need to produce documents, posters and flyers.

3. **Social networking.** On the home page there is a photo file where you can store your photos and the communication displays you have made in the DRAW app. There is also the I-Pod and Email. There are Apps that you can download simply for playing games i.e. Tic Tac Toe. Now… in terms of does the I-Pad serve a communication device role – yes it does in this area as well as the area of dedicated communication aide Apps. I know many occasions where family members and friends/support workers didn’t have the skills to use the dedicated communication device and in some cases they couldn’t facilitate either. Using the games they were able to experience level 2 facilitated communications with the user, engage in non test, non judgmental games and simply have fun. It must beat sitting in front of the TV or going bowling or waiting for the speech therapist to call once a month so that you can interact!

4. **Developing Access.** This is probably the most exciting area I’ve seen to date. Looking at what may lie in store for us in the future I am sure that we will see a lot more call for us to use our limbs to scroll, tap, swipe and keyboard. Several years ago I used a public loo in New Zealand and later that year in Perth. What a scary experience… I swiped my hand over a touch pad to enter the loo and lock the door behind
me, I made the same action to make the toilet seat work, the flush and the wash basin. Essentially – I touched NOTHING. We have to get people ready for the movements they will need to interact in society.

The I-Pad has some great Apps to motivate people to use these access skills. If people cannot use these access skills but can keyboard then you can get a plug in keyboard. Children whom I would not have considered for the use of an I-Pad have shown me how wrong I could be... motivation and having a tool that non disabled people use, appears to be a huge motivator. You may like to look at the access skills needed for the following: the carry cases, Clicky-Sticky, Photos, I-Books, Talking Carl, I-Pod.

5. **Cognitive, especially Attention and memory.** The I-Pad is a tool that mainstream people use. It isn’t associated with disability. It is clear, user friendly and ‘people’ know it – there is shared knowledge and something to talk about rather than continually ‘learn and explain’.

   a. The girls with Rett Syndrome who need music as the catalyst to free up and maintain movement can play their music while I do therapy on the same piece of equipment.

   b. The people who sign can access with me the Auslan Dictionary as we need it – we don’t have to switch attention to where the book might be and then look it up.

   c. The people who have had an ABI or stroke can watch videos of the mouth postures, phrase-scenes or film of routines to help elicit and develop language.

   d. Most people can see visual information, schedules, choices, feedback when I use the Draw App (which I can also save to Photos) and use again later.

   e. Those who are writing songs can put the beat or rhythm to their songs using Apps like Piano, Xylophone, Easy Beat and Tone Pad.

   f. My clients who want to spell and share their I-Pad can use Apps like Yes/No, Speak It, I Speak, or just the Notes App.

**Switching from I-Tech to VOCA** – I personally think many would find a VOCA boring after using just an I-Pad and that’s why I suggest to the children that the I-Pad is Mummy’s and Daddy’s and they will use it with you.
The VOCA is the child’s and it IS their voice. Each has a specific role or roles in the person’s life. Although we may be tempted to try to compare the VOCAs with the I-Tech, I don’t think we should. Its like comparing apples and oranges...both fruit but both different in what they offer and how they are accessed/used.

**Durability and Portability** – and user friendliness all depend on the user and common sense, I Tech is made for the mainstream community. It’s made to fit into a bag, to be light and slim line for portability, Its durability will be linked to cost and I suspect it will become a ‘disposable’ item in the near future and one from which we quickly seek upgrades like we do for mobile phones and electrical goods.

**Access**

The two boys who introduced me to the I-Pad were aged 3 and 8 and had cerebral palsy. They showed me that without facilitation they could tap, scroll, expand-reduce and tap-drag. I would not have thought that they had the skills for this. One of the boys has also shown that when he wants to do something different and not what I want him to do, he makes a big ‘scroll’ movement in front of me as if to tell me to ‘move on to something else’!! One of the best Apps for people with access problems seems to be DRAW as you you can draw up communication choice displays and save them to photographs.

**Value For Money**

One parent has suggested that she buy another I-Pad just for the ProLoquo2go software so that her son has a dedicated communication tool. This would still make her outlay $1500 with the App. For two I-Pads. If you are worried about the cost of the I-Pad at $650 for the medium range one then I suggest waiting for prices to come down or paying the money and make good use of the Anxiety App. yourself.

**Security.**

Use the Me network and secure the I-Pad so that if its stolen no one can access your material. Maybe one day I will have two I-Pads...one for therapy and one for running my business and presentations. The Mobile Me is one form of security you can look at for the I-Pad and I-tech.
Personalising Communication Software.

No one is going to pay or fund a private practitioner to do this. Reality check here. The people who need to do the programming and acquire/refine their programming skills are the parents or key people assisting the person with the communication impairment. Many of the parents I have met do have the skills to do this and have shown me what they have done. I feel its our job to empower parents/communication partners as programmers and make them feel more like valued team members.

Final Comments

Don’t try to compare the I-Tech with VOCAS or AAC devices. In mainstream we have communication tools which include speech, gesture, pen, paper, keyboard, I-Tech. In disability they have these tools plus low and high tech communication equipment. Just like the VOCAs, the way you access the I-Pad can be tricky to start with so you need to try and also practice.

This paper was presented at the I-Pad panel discussion held with Disability Services Queensland December 2010. I am happy for the paper to be circulated.

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Jane Remington-Gurney

Director

Options Communication Therapy and Training Centre

www.optionsctc.com.au

http://www.apple.com/mobileme/


newsletters@kpower.com.au
iPhone App Fridge Magnets

Product Code: FRIDMAG
Unit: Each
New Arrival

AU$15.00

Qty 1

Whatever you want to do... There's an app for that. That's right. Whether you want to buy movie tickets, read the news, write a review, pay a tip, catch a taxi, or even train your dog, there's an app to help you out. But what if you want to hang a photo on the fridge, put a spreadsheet on the whiteboard at work, leave a note on the filing cabinet, leave a note on the microwave, or save that Chinese take-out menu in a place where you can't lose it? When it came to certain old-school tasks, the apps were coming up short.

A little reverse innovation was needed. Well, good news, everyone... Now there's an app for that, too and no 24 month contract required! Apple products are sometimes sources of special products created by the brand's fans. After the keyboard-inspired jewellery and the clock made of the iBook, now comes iPhone icon or better known as apps (short for applications) fridge magnets from one of New York's finest design companies. The perfect gift for all iPhone users and those people who wish they had one.