Tyne Metropolitan College: Using iPads for sensory engagement

Summary

Tyne Metropolitan College (TyneMet) has been able to make costs savings by using iPads for sensory engagement, instead of the more expensive touch screen computers. iPads have been proven to be a more affordable and portable alternative. Learners within the department of Foundation Studies have been introduced to new ways of self expression and helped to develop their communication skills.

About TyneMet

TyneMet is a medium sized general FE College in the North East. The College offers full-time Foundation Learning courses for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The learners within the Department of Foundation Studies fall into four broad categories:

- Profound complex and multiple learning difficulties and disabilities.
- Moderate learning difficulties and disabilities.
Social and behavioural difficulties.

Autism Spectrum Disorder and Aspergers Syndrome.

**The challenge**

Learners with profound complex and multiple learning difficulties and disabilities typically engage in physical sensory curriculum through interaction with texture, weight, sound and light stimuli. Learners on the Towards Independence course had little opportunity to engage with accessible technology because touch-screen computers are prohibitively expensive and are quite restricted in their use due to networking issues and general lack of portability. The Towards Independence course helps learners to work to individual targets based on their abilities, interests and needs to develop, extend and acquire communication skills.

**The activity**

Staff at the Department of Foundation Studies researched the overall costs of various touch screen systems and portability and screen positioning aides as well as tablet computers (iPads) with wireless connectivity. The IT department looked at potential connectivity and compatibility issues.

A cost benefit analysis concluded that three iPads could be purchased for the same price as one touch screen PC. The team also learned that:

- Up to five iPads can be linked to one iTunes account; this enables a single App to be downloaded to five tablets, thereby reducing the costs associated with purchased Apps.
- The Apple iPad tablet computers have a bigger screen size.
- The Apple store provides a good support service and an App can be tried in store before purchasing it.

The team decided to buy three Apple iPads and researched appropriate Apps for the learners.

**The outcomes**

Learners have been able to engage in an e-sensory curriculum at a fraction of the price compared to a touch screen computer such as a Dynavox.

The team has been using the iPads regularly with the learners and found the following Apps particularly successful:

- Proloquo2Go™ is an Augmentative and Alternative Communication solution for people who have difficulty speaking or cannot speak at all. It can be adapted to suit the needs of a wide range of users with varying literacy levels. Featuring natural-sounding voices, speech can be generated by tapping
buttons with symbols or typing using the on-screen keyboard with word prediction.

- Pocket Pond: an app with interactive water which reacts to touches and swipes.
- Garageband: this App is used to turn the iPad into a collection of Touch Instruments and a full-featured recording studio.
- MyChoicePad: an educational App that uses Makaton symbols and signs to enable choice and communication for adults with learning or communication difficulties.

The iPad is also used with a pico projector to create pop-up sensory engagement opportunities projected within a tent in the classroom.

**The impact**

The iPads have introduced the learners to new ways of self expression using accessible ICT and helped to develop their communication skills. Using the iPads has increased the interaction of one learner in a sensory setting by more than 70%.

**The lessons learned**

- One of the problems the team encountered was a weak wireless signal in the classroom where the iPads were to be used. To solve this problem, two new wireless access points were installed in either wing of the block which guaranteed a strong enough signal for learners to be able to move around the learning environment.
- Another problem was finding a suitable bracket for mounting clamp to be able to support the iPad mounted to a wheelchair for learners with limited fine and gross motor skills.

**Useful links**

- Tyne Metropolitan College
- Jisc RSC Northern

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