Educatating Parents and Therapists About Therapeutic iPad Use

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Abstract

In 2013, 75% of all children in the United States had access to some type of smart mobile device at home. These statistics began growing exponentially after the release of the iPad in 2010 and continue to grow today. With the continued growth of technology use, it is important for children to understand how to use this technology to enhance their social participation and develop important skills. The purpose of this residency project was to educate parents and therapists about how iPads can be used for therapeutic purposes. This project took place at Pediatric Therapies in Franklin, Tennessee and consisted of three phases. In the first phase, education sessions were conducted for therapists and parents about therapeutic iPad use. In the second phase, meetings were conducted with interested parents to make recommendations specific to each child. Additionally, children utilized iPads in therapy sessions to encourage development of skills. In the last phase, a resource guide was created and provided to the clinic. This guide included a list of apps categorized by skill addressed and handouts about iPad use for therapists to provide to caregivers as needed. Additional opportunities that came about through the course of this project included writing an article for an online parenting newsletter and presenting educational material at First United Methodist Preschool, Christ Presbyterian Academy, and the Assistive Technology class at Belmont University. Educating parents, therapists, and teachers through this project prepared them to make informed decisions about how iPads can be used therapeutically with children, including those with disabilities.

Mission Statement

The mission of this project was to educate parents, teachers, and therapists about the therapeutic benefits of iPads and other smart devices for children. The purpose was to allow children the best opportunity to use the technology age in which they are living in the most productive way possible. It is the hope that, through this project, parents and children were encouraged to use their smart devices to facilitate participation in everyday life rather than hinder it.

Needs Assessment

• Barriers to iPad Use
• Lack of knowledge about apps
• Concerns about negative effects of screen time
• Technical concerns

Goals and Outcomes

To design a resource guide to assist therapists in recommending the most appropriate apps for their clients and how to best utilize these apps in their daily lives

To demonstrate leadership skills in the ability to plan and run a parent education session, specifically how iPads can be used to aid in their child’s development

To collaborate with therapists, parents, and children in order to make personalized recommendations for each child that will help them work toward meeting their therapy goals

Literature Review

• iPads have been found to have many benefits for children, especially those with disabilities. These benefits include the following:
  • Fun, engaging, and motivating
  • Portable and convenient
  • Customizable for each child’s unique needs
  • Commercially available
  • Intuitive and easy to use
  • Facilitate social participation and joint attention skills
  • Functions as multiple tools
  • Assists in developing a variety of skills
  • Increases self-efficacy

• In order for children to experience these benefits, therapists must work with families to identify appropriate apps and make suggestions about how the iPad can best be used for each child

• In order to ensure children are using the iPad to learn and develop, it is essential to evaluate apps to find the most appropriate for each child’s needs. Characteristics to look for include:
  • Open content apps
  • Promotes sustained engagement without being over stimulating
  • Provides opportunities to share and connect with others
  • Allows child to explore new concepts and learn on their own terms
  • Customizable
  • Developmentally appropriate
  • Interactive, requires active learning
  • Assists in building connections to the external environment
  • iPads are a powerful tool to assist children in obtaining knowledge and developing skills, but real world experiences remain essential to successful development

References available upon request

Apps

Writing Wizard
• Handwriting app that includes tracing and writing shapes and lines, letters, numbers, words, and sentences
• In this project: Addressed fine motor coordination, prewriting skills, finger isolation, visual motor integration, letter formation and directionality, letter sizing and spacing

My Story Book Creator
• Children create stories by drawing or downloading pictures, recording their voice, and typing words; story plays like a movie; can also be used to create social stories
• In this project: Addressed imaginative play, creativity, social participation, cooperation, and turn taking

Finger Paint with Sounds
• Use colors and sounds to paint designs and pictures; when child touches the screen, music plays; when child takes hand off screen, music stops
• In this project: Addressed cause and effect, finger isolation, prewriting skills, also used to encourage use of LUE in case of left-sided weakness

ASD Tools
• Visual communication app that includes first then board, step by step schedule, token board, and timer
• In this project: Addressed executive functioning skills, such as planning and prioritizing, task initiation, and organization; also serves as assistive device for children who have difficulty with these skills

Symmetry Exercises for Kids
• Copy, move, and complete drawings by dragging finger to create lines on grid; print activities to encourage carry over to real world tasks
• In this project: Addressed visual motor integration, visual perception, copying, symmetry, eye hand coordination, and fine motor coordination

References available upon request