

Local speech pathologist uses iPad for therapies

*Written by Meaghan Glassett
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The new Apple iPad is all the rage, but Hanson native Tammy Taylor-Mastropietro is using the new technology creatively, to communicate with her autistic and nonverbal clients in her Speech Language Pathology Center on Liberty Street.

Through the use of the Apple iPad applications, Taylor-Mastropietro is helping people learn to communicate.

Before opening up the Speech Language Pathology Center from home in August, she worked in the public school system.

Taylor-Mastropietro now specializes in feeding therapy, augmentative alternative communication and general speech therapy.

In her practice, she has introduced a program called Proloquo 2 to her clients. Before she had access to the Apple iPad, she was using the Apple iPod, which is the size of a cell phone.

While the iPad was in the process of being introduced, she worked with the Apple store in Hingham to come up with a copy of specifications for someone who may need to use the device for AAC.

She now trains people on how to use the communications system. She does so by going to their home and setting it up with their personal computer. The families are also trained and shown how to customize the device for each participant.

"In this format it's a communication system for people who may suffer from autism, apraxia of speech (trouble communicating), traumatic brain injury, stroke or oral motor issues.

For the iPad, the Proloquo application is set up by folders or schemes that the people can use to communicate their thoughts, which are then organized by categories or grammatical markers (nouns, verbs and adjectives.)

An application can be formatted to say things like "I need..." and the program can speak for them.

"If they were shopping they could converse with the clerk using something like this," Taylor-Mastropietro said. "If they were at a restaurant they can preprogram the menu adding some of their favorite choices."

Taylor-Mastropietro said a huge component of the therapy is having the individual work with her to customize their iPad. The device can store pictures of family members, favorite activities and special outings.

She added that using visual schemes is in line with her work with the autistic population.

The technology tool also has an application for sign language with a full video translator. Taylor-Mastropietro said these applications are just a few of her favorites for speech and language therapy.

Her office is also a resource center for Proloquo2Go, which allows someone interested in the system to come in to work with her and test the product to see if it would be a good program for that person.

In her work with clients she also uses the PECS cards (for receptive and expressive language development), Tap to Talk (provides basic communications), articulation therapy using flashcards and the program Dragon (for dynamic speaking).

Taylor-Mastropietro works with many modes for her therapy including puzzles, games, books, bubbles and whistles.

She also has patients who see her for feeding therapy.

"Feeding therapy is really family based. It's working with children, who for one reason or another, have had a delay in feeding skills," she said. "My goal is to have them start to enjoy food by playing with it, by linking new foods to foods they are currently eating and teaching them the oral motor skills they need to handle different food textures and consistencies."

She said she has worked with three-year-old patients that came to the office still drinking from a bottle and leave drinking from a cup and eating hamburgers.

"It takes a lot of family involvement and you have to build a trust with the child in order to let them near the oral cavity," she said.

In her spare time, Taylor-Mastropietro evaluates standardized tests for speech and language.

"The most rewarding aspect of having a private clinic, is working with children to meet their individual goals from start to finish," she said. "You really get to see the progress. It's amazing when you see someone come in drinking from a bottle and leave using a cup."