

Just the right touch: the iPad and autism

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Ever since the iPad came out this year, a lot of people have asked if I've tried it. "It's amazing!" they exclaim. "It's so accessible, right out of the box!"

I'm blind, so I figured they were simply talking about VoiceOver, the built-in screen access program built in to every iPad. But hey, guess what? The iPad offers cool stuff for people with other disabilities, too. Take autism, for example: an article in last week's San Francisco Weekly says the iPad is a "quiet revolution" for the autism community.

Since the iPad's unveiling in April, autism experts and parents have brought it into countless homes and classrooms around the world. Developers have begun pumping out applications specifically designed for users with special needs, and initial studies are already measuring the effectiveness of the iPod Touch and the iPad as learning tools for children with autism. Through the devices, some of these children have been able to communicate their thoughts to adults for the first time. Others have learned life skills that had eluded them for years.

Other computers (and computer software) have been specifically designed for people with autism, but the article says some experts think the iPad is better.

It's cheaper, faster, more versatile, more user-friendly, more portable, more engaging, and infinitely cooler for young people. "I just couldn't imagine not introducing this to a parent of a child who has autism," says Tammy Mastropietro, a speech pathologist based outside Boston who uses the technology with numerous clients. She sees it as a game changer for those with autism, particularly those most severely affected.

If any of our readers out there with autism have tried the iPad, we'd love to hear from you. I've tried the voiceover, and must say: it's pretty cool