Hello Everyone!

According to U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, by 2009, 97% of teachers had one or more computers located in the classroom every day. The fact that they had to add the words "every day", paints a picture in my mind of teachers rolling in clunky, green audio-visual carts when it is their turn to use the school computers. Despite the growing availability of technology in education, I wonder how many of those teachers feel confident that they are using computers and IPads effectively with the special education students in their classroom. Technology is ever present in society and teaching our students to appropriately use it is important. However; the seemingly limitless amount of information available via the internet can be overwhelming. Educational programs purchased by districts for the general population of students may not be appropriate for our students with special needs. There are many snazzy apps and entertaining websites but how do we know that their use results in academic progress? Computer-aided instruction within the day of some students occurs only as a reinforcer. Although fine in small doses, this does not in itself qualify as "instruction". When given the choice, our students with autism may visit the same site over and over and over. When I am 90 years old, I will still be singing the zigzag song from starfall.com. I do have an above average understanding of the phoneme "Z" as a result, but I am not sure that qualifies as true academic gain.

The good news is that using the computer can be more than just reinforcing. Did you know that Computer-Aided Instruction is listed as an evidence based practice for students with autism by the National Professional Development Center (NPDC) on Autism Spectrum Disorders? According to NPDC, "The evidence-base for Computer-Aided Instruction includes studies conducted with learners ranging from 3 years to 18 years of age. Within the domain of communication skills and in the area of academics and cognition, the research has shown success with early childhood through secondary age learners". By going to **http://autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu/content/computer-aided-instruction,** you can check out their briefs, steps for implementation and implementation checklist. The checklist is simple and can be used as a guide for any program or website you choose. Number 1 on the list is "refer to a learner's IEP or IFSP to identify the learner's goals"!

Since it is time for my second favorite holiday, I will leave you with an Irish blessing:

May love and laughter light your days,
and warm your heart and home.
May good and faithful friends be yours,
wherever you may roam.
May peace and plenty bless your world
with joy that long endures.
May all life's passing seasons
bring the best to you and yours!

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