



A Conversation with Dr. Janet Twyman: Tips for Using Technology for Instruction

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The Autism Learning Partnership team had the pleasure of learning from Dr. Twyman at a recent two-day conference on the use of technology as a teaching tool for learners with ASD at an event organized by [APSEA Autism in Education](#). She generously gave of her time to share some general advice for educators with us.

What advice do you have for teachers who are interested in using apps for learners with ASD?

People typically associate apps with an application you can download on your phone or tablets, but they can also be software programs. The following are three essential elements when selecting and using learning or behaviour change apps.

Evidence-based methodology: Try to find programs that incorporate teaching methodologies that we already know that are effective (e.g. reinforcement, prompting, shaping, chaining, time delay, etc.)

Measure, Measure, Measure: Some programs will incorporate a measurement system, but many may not or may not measure enough information to make data-based decisions.

Don't be Afraid to Try Something New: Try out a new technology, and give it a little time so that you can measure and track the learner's progress.

Do you recommend using apps to teach new skills or to supplement instruction for generalization?

Both! Apps have the capacity to do both things. Any particular program may not have been created with that intent, but a teacher could certainly use apps for both purposes. Whether you use the app to teach or practise, a skill will be dependent on the learner. Some programs, such as Headsprout, which is an evidence-based program we developed to teach English reading skills, can be used as the primary mode of instruction. The student will then be able to naturally generalize those skills within the learning environment and any reading task. Learners with diverse needs may require assistance to learn from the program. For any teaching, including teaching using digital technology, it is essential to consider how the skill will be generalized to the natural environment.

What is a common error that you see related to using apps for teaching?

The most common error is assuming that the app is good, and that skills are mastered once the student has completed the app. For example, if you use an app to teach colours, don't assume that the app is well designed or that the learner has mastered the concept of colours as a result of the app. Many apps are designed by programmers who do not have the background in teaching a new repertoire of skills, as opposed to apps developed by educators or instructional designers. Don't make assumptions!



Janet Twyman, Ph.D, BCBA, NYSLBA

Janet S. Twyman is the founder of blast: a learning sciences company, and currently serves as the Director of Innovation & Technology for the U.S. Dept. of Education's national Center on Innovations in Learning. Dr. Twyman is a noted proponent of effective instruction and using technology to produce individual and system-wide change. She served as the VP of Instructional Development at Headsprout, an award-winning learning sciences technology company and was VP of Learning Sciences and Technologies at ABA Technologies. For full bio: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/janet-twyman-a132436>