Foreword

“Is your son high functioning or low functioning autistic?” I am asked by a well-dressed, well-meaning woman in her 30s, minutes before I am about to offer a keynote about Inclusion. “He’s both.” I smile and am then whisked on to the podium.

I later explain to the group of 400 that if you put my son in a crowded classroom with 30 students, each clamoring for attention from the teacher, he may run around in circles, hold his hands over his ears, make seemingly bizarre sounds, appear like he is not paying attention, and be deemed “low functioning.” However, if you observe him in the Santa Monica Mountains, confidently leading the same 30 teens on a hike, you would think of him as “high functioning.” For these main reasons and more, I prefer not to use the terms “high functioning” and “low functioning” and instead paraphrase my mentor and dear friend, Dr. Barry Prizant, “Different levels of supports in different environments” (2012).

In a crowded classroom, my son needs considerable support; he wears headphones to block out the excessive noise and unpredictable sounds, and he requires a one-on-one aide to help him stay focused. In nature, as I mentioned, my son needs limited support. He can navigate trails independently and holds a job working in an organic garden. Although he is severely apraxic and cannot verbally express language, he understands everything. Today, thanks to the advent of assistive technology, my son can participate in group discussions by using a voice activated app on his iPad called ProLoquo2Go to express his immediate needs. He can independently order “pasta with butter and cheese, please” at any restaurant by simply locating the food icon on his iPad, and when he shows up to work in the organic garden, dressed in his Shalom Institute Staff T-Shirt, he can proudly choose, “Hi Boss. I’m ready for work.” With support from a communication partner, he can type more involved thoughts on his iPad using the app “Speak It.”

Since the creation of the iPad and all of the similar tech products now available, individuals like my son, can be seen at an equal intellectual footing with verbal peers. Because of technology, parents are connecting with their children on the spectrum in ways never before possible. Portia Iverson, writes in her book, Strange Son, that when she asked her severely challenged nine-year-old son, Dov, what he was doing all of the years before he learned to type, he responded, “Listening” (2006, p. 340).

Technology is truly changing the world for individuals of all ages and all abilities who have autism. The challenge has been that there are so many new and exciting technologies for children with autism across the globe with no “portal” to vet this plethora of information and bring it altogether. Until now.

Enter Dr. Nava Silton, who passionately cares about enhancing the way technology improves communication, socialization, and education for those diagnosed with ASD. Silton has successfully compiled this most needed text to describe many of the innovative technologies that can be employed to improve the lives of individuals with autism while also critically assessing their efficacy. She has highlighted technologies that benefit those with minimal or no language as well as included a discussion of virtual...
reality, robots, video modeling, video gaming, and various other technologies that appeal to individuals on the autistic spectrum. With the rise of the many usages of technology, Silton’s text is extremely important to help benefit the lives of so many.

In The Miracle Project, an inclusive theater arts program, non-verbal children with autism type lyrics to songs that verbal children on the spectrum can sing. When participating in our classes, Ido Kedar (Ido in Autismland), an author, self-advocate, and individual with non-verbal autism, remarks that he hears the songs in his head. Debunking the myth that children with autism prefer to be alone and do not desire friendships, Dashiel Chandler, a minimally fluent fourteen year old, used his iPad to type these lyrics to a song which Katiana Zimmerman, The Miracle Project Music Director, composed. Below are some of the lyrics:

Friends come in all shapes and sizes
Friends are there when you need them
Friends are the most important part of my life
I love my friends so much
I love my friends so much
I love my friends so much
They’re the most important part of my life

Technology enhances the lives of verbal kids as well. In my classes, I’ve witnessed highly verbal teens with Asperger’s finding their creative voices leading towards careers using technology. Ezra Fields-Meyer, the subject of his Dad’s (Tom Fields-Meyer) book, Following Ezra, created the artwork for The Miracle Project t-shirts and show programs. After taking a class in animation, Ezra posted a YouTube animated short about the letters A through Z sharing a home and supporting each other, called “Alphabet House.” Children’s book writer, Tom Lichtenheld, randomly saw the YouTube clip and contacted Ezra. Together, they then collaborated on the award-winning children’s picture book E-mergeny!

On April 2, 2013, my son and I were invited to speak at The United Nations in honor of World Autism Awareness Day. After I finished my speech, appealing to the group to focus on the abilities and gifts of autism rather than the deficits, my son was called up to the podium. He calmly opened his iPad, pushed “speak” and played a speech he had typed in school:

I cannot speak. For whatever reason, God has intended for me to be mute. Many people might believe that I cannot think, but despite their thinking, I can. What’s more is that I listen. A lot of people may stare at me, and when they do, I listen to their body movements and eye gaze. I listen to their ignorance. I listen because I have no choice but to take in the world in the way I can… I’ve listened enough. It’s time for me to speak, however it may sound. Through an electronic device, my hands, or my mouth. Now it’s your turn to listen. Are you ready? (Katz, 2013)
Thank you, Nava Silton for showing the many ways that our kids can “speak.” My hope is that this work, *Innovative Technologies to Benefit Children with Autism*, will be read by parents, professionals, educators, and employers to see what is possible. We are ready.

*Elaine Hall*

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**Elaine Hall** is a motivational speaker, inclusion activist, and founder of the Miracle Project. She was profiled in the HBO film *AUTISM: The Musical*, is the author of *Now I See the Moon* (HarperCollins 2010) and co-author of *Seven Keys to Unlock Autism: Making Miracles in the Classroom* (Wiley 2011).

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**REFERENCES**

