

LiS 490, Information Environment

The Impact Of Facilitated Communication

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for
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Facilitated communication (F/C) is a method of eliciting expressive language from people who are nonverbal, or are limited in their expressive ability.¹ These people—through supported typing on a letterboard, keyboard, or Canon Communicator—can spell out their half of a dialog. The method usually involves a facilitator supporting the hand of the individual while isolating the index finger so the person may select the letters, spaces, and short words (“yes,” “no,” and “more” are often letterboard choices) of their reply. Developed by Rosemary Crossley of Australia in the 1980s, F/C came to the United States in 1989 through the efforts of Douglas Biklen of Syracuse University. Although Crossley’s Dignity through Education and Language (DEAL) Center in Melbourne caters to those with all manner of speech delays, she provides a telling statistic: from 1986 through 1990, ninety-five percent of DEAL’s enrollment was students diagnosed autistic, intellectually impaired, or both.² That autistic individuals surfaced as prime candidates for F/C should not be surprising, considering what the *Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM4)* sets as diagnostic features of autistic disorder relative to communication. The *DSM4* cites impairment in both verbal and nonverbal development—and adds that while the profile of cognitive skills is uneven, among “higher functioning” autistic children, “the level of receptive language . .

¹ Annegret Schubert, editor, *Facilitated Communication Resource Guide*, (Brookline, MA: Adrianna Foundation, 1992), D-1.

² Rosemary Crossley, *Facilitated Communication Training*, (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 1994), 5.

. is below that of expressive language.”³ That is, they understand language better than they can speak it.

The technique to help them “speak” is F/C. F/C’s technology runs the spectrum from home-made letterboards to computer keyboards, but the most popular output device is the Canon Communicator. Battery operated and portable, the Canon is basically a label maker with a one-line read out screen and keys in alphabetical order. Another advantage of Canon Communicators is the tape printout provides data for evaluation. Two items to keep in mind regarding F/C devices is they do not have to be “high technology” and the idea itself is not new. Biklen, in the report that became the impetus for F/C in America, provides a brief historic perspective.⁴ The Edison Response Environment (ERE) of the late 1960s—a cubicle furnished with an electric typewriter, projector, and programming device that could respond to/direct the user—had some success with autistic children. This was not true F/C, since the students interacted directly with the ERE, but the experimenters’ point that the ERE showed abilities not measured by regular mental testing methods was not lost on those who followed. In 1974, Rosalind Oppenheim first wrote of “hand-over hand” work, guiding autistic students in handwriting. She described intensive physical support early in the process, which was gradually faded to just a finger on the student’s writing hand.

Oppenheim was also first to report the autistic child’s difficulty with writing stems from apraxia.⁵ Biklen used this notion to develop his theory that autism is a neurologically-based problem of expression. By “praxis” Biklen means those who are autistic and do not speak are nonverbal only because

³ *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fourth Edition, (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1994), 66-67.

⁴ Douglas Biklen, “Communication Unbound: Autism and Praxis,” *Harvard Educational Review*, 60, no. 3, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 304.

⁵ Rosalind C. Oppenheim, *Effective Teaching Methods for Autistic Children*, (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1974), 54-55.

there is a problem with the speaking output, not the understanding.⁶ He verifies this theory by citing the continuum of language ability among autistic individuals and describing how the level of output among those facilitated varied, even among students the same age and using the same facilitator.⁷ Biklen quotes a 1988 Crossley study in which, among thirty-four subjects, twenty-three were communicating in sentences and two used single words. He also cites the first study he conducted, including twenty-two subjects ranging in age from three to twenty-one; all “demonstrated literacy,” with nineteen producing sentences.⁸ In fact, their typed communication was free of the pronoun reversal and incorrect verb tenses common to the syntax of verbal autistic individuals.

Stephen Calculator, however, counters that Biklen’s “apraxia theory” carries inadequately tested assumptions borrowed from neurology.⁹ Based on his research, Calculator says Biklen should not be so quick to hard-label it developmental apraxia when the trouble may be merely in functional articulation. To illustrate this point, Calculator cites the example of “Louis” from Biklen’s “Communication Unbound,” who went from no contact with F/C to typing complex sentences in his first session.¹⁰ If what F/C does is help autistic individuals overcome neuromotor difficulties, one session should not be enough practice. In the introduction to her experiment’s report, Marilyn Cabay acknowledges Biklen’s attention to “dyspraxia” (which Crossley writes is synonymous with “apraxia”¹¹) is not new in autism research. However, communication and cognition deficits have equal or more importance.¹² She states Biklen’s

⁶ Biklen, “Communication Unbound,” 303.

⁷ Biklen, “Communication Unbound,” 296.

⁸ Biklen, “Typing to Talk: Facilitated Communication,” *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 1, no. 2, (Rockville, MD: American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 1992), 16.

⁹ Stephen N. Calculator, “Facilitated Communication: Calculator Responds,” *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 1, no. 2, 23.

¹⁰ Biklen, “Communication Unbound,” 310.

¹¹ Crossley, *Facilitated Communication Training*, 134.

claims of unexpected literacy coupled with an unwillingness to promote quantitative F/C experimentation invite critical scrutiny.¹³ Carol Vázquez questions these claims of literacy as well: “Since language development is traditionally viewed as a reflection of cognitive development, autistic people who suffer severe language deficit are assumed to be severely mentally retarded.”¹⁴

Biklen admits the proof of F/C’s validity is not “iron-clad,” but indicators the communication was the person’s own were strong enough to justify validity.¹⁵ The main problems with these indicators for those conducting quantitative research is the wide variety of facilitation given, why this physical contact is necessary at all, and the consistent evidence of facilitator influence on the output. The seven experiments used for this review each allowed the usual facilitators to work with their regular subjects. Five of the experiments used Canon Communicators; one other used a computer keyboard and the other a laminated letterboard. Considering that only one experiment was specifically testing the level of facilitator assistance, the range of touch facilitation is bewildering if not confounding. Left to facilitate by their usual method, the facilitator’s hand—for various experiments—was on the subject’s forearm, under the forearm, on the hand, under the hand, or touching the shoulder or wrist. The Smith (*et al.*) experiment specifically tested three levels of facilitator support: none (that is, independent typing), hand-over-hand without a “correcting” counterforce, and hand-over-hand with this counterforce. The counterforce is facilitator-applied resistance away from the keyboard, so the subject is required to push purposefully forward to select keys.¹⁶ Without getting too deeply into the experimental method and makeup here (see

¹² Marilyn Cabay, “Brief Report: A Controlled Evaluation of Facilitated Communication Using Open-Ended and Fill-in Questions,” *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 24, no. 4, (New York, NY: Plenum Publishing, 1994), 517.

¹³ Cabay, “Controlled Evaluation of Facilitated Communication,” 518.

¹⁴ Carol A. Vázquez, “Brief Report: A Multitask Controlled Evaluation of Facilitated Communication,” *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 24, no. 3, 369.

¹⁵ Biklen, “Communication Unbound,” 311.

¹⁶ Marcia Datlow Smith, Pamela J. Haas, and Ronald G. Belcher, “Facilitated Communication: The Effects of

page 11), there were ten subjects replying to randomly asked questions about four objects, four pictures and four verbal messages (for a total of 120 responses). Besides the three support levels given, two conditions were tested. For half of the stimuli, the facilitator was given an index card that matched the object, picture, or phrase; for the other half, the facilitator's index card did not match. In all three conditions, when the facilitator was unaware of the correct stimulus, the response was always incorrect. With medium support and the facilitator aware (that is, receiving matching information), one subject had three correct responses. With full support and the facilitator aware, there were fifty-nine correct responses. If what Biklen, Crossley, and many other proponents of F/C say is true about the facilitator contact being mostly a show of emotional support, there should have been no distinguishable difference between medium and full support results. Not only was this not evidenced, but the experimenters took their results a step further, providing a table of responses matching the output with what the facilitators saw when the facilitators received different information from that the subject was exposed to. In these cases, no responses matched with no support given, one matched at medium support, and fifty responses at full support matched the facilitators' incorrect information.¹⁷

Adding this to similar findings, Smith, Haas, and Belcher conclude facilitated communication is actually "facilitated control."¹⁸ Both detractors from and proponents of F/C acknowledge this "Ouija board" effect and offer suggestions for dealing with it. Bligh and Kupperman provide a listing of suspect indicators including: 1) communication containing nothing the facilitator does not know or information the subject was never exposed to, 2) errors in simple facts (like the subject using the wrong name for a sibling), and 3) who is looking at the keyboard and screen during the communication, the subject or the

Facilitator Knowledge and Level of Assistance on Output," *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 24, no. 3, 361.

¹⁷ Smith, et al., "Effects of Facilitator Knowledge," 366.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 364.

facilitator.¹⁹ Schubert and Biklen offer these suggestions to guard against facilitator influence: 1) make sure the typist looks at the keyboard, 2) provide the minimum support needed for the person to type, 3) give constant “backward” pressure, 4) clarify with “Are you sure that’s what you meant?” and 5) do not over-interpret what is typed.²⁰

However, Bernard Rimland questions why the physical support is necessary for subjects with little or no motor difficulties, like most autistic subjects. He states until recently the goal of independent typing has been ignored by the F/C promoters.²¹ Not until 1993 did Biklen acknowledge that having the typists look at the keyboard was an important goal. In February of 1993, Marilyn Chadwick—one of the Syracuse F/C pioneers—published steps for “Achieving Independent Typing.” Previously, the pro-F/C camp considered their subjects to have superb peripheral vision and spatial memory which made looking at what they type unnecessary. Rimland also sees Biklen’s new concentration on nonverbal users and admission that F/C should not be the preferred mode of speech for those who are verbal as steps in the right direction. The next step for F/C supporters, in Rimland’s view, is to support quantitative experimentation. Biklen claims their “qualitative” testing is accurate, not merely anecdotal, and has precedent in the social sciences, including education.²² He and Crossley also say the subjects react so negatively to testing that it skews the results. While Rimland acknowledges no one likes to be tested, it is necessary to yield the proof not yet evident, so everyone can get behind F/C as a preferred method of speech.

James McLean, in his wrap up of the Biklen/Calculator debate, expounds on this point. He states if F/C

¹⁹ Sally Bligh and Phyllis Kupperman, “Brief Report: Facilitated Communication Evaluation Procedure Accepted in a Court Case,” *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 23, no. 3, 554.

²⁰ Annegret Schubert and Doug Biklen, “Issues of Influence: Some Concerns and Suggestions,” *Facilitated Communication Digest*, 1, no. 3, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1993), 11-12.

²¹ Bernard Rimland, “Facilitated Communication: A Light at the End of the Tunnel?,” *Autism Research Review International*, 7, no. 3, (San Diego, CA: Autism Research Institute, 1993), 3.

²² Biklen, “Facilitated Communication: Biklen Responds,” *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 1, no. 2, 21.

is the dialogue of choice for a certain group, the professional community needs to be open to it before the public will.²³ McLean also points out the need to document and replicate successes, a stage F/C has not gotten to yet.

The main stumbling block to F/C getting to this level is the issue of facilitation versus control. In follow-ups to many of the experiments, facilitators are always shocked at their level of assistance. When confronted with the data, they attribute the facilitator influence to other causes. In Cabay's study, the facilitator said it occurred because *her subject* was agitated.²⁴ Some even claim client telepathy.²⁵ Even in Biklen's earliest article on the subject, he admits to a controversy over who is "speaking."²⁶ Biklen admits to his own facilitator influence, "cueing" in a first session with a student called "Bette." He asked if her full name was Beth, Elizabeth, or Bette. She typed "Elizabeth," but he found out later her name is really Beth.²⁷ Another problem with the facilitator as filter is evidenced by Biklen's notes from the Australia trip. The questions and replies are not recorded as the students typed them, but as the facilitators read them aloud to Biklen.²⁸ Because of gray areas like these, Vázquez is summing up the disquiet of the professional community in stating F/C is "somewhere between a miracle and a hoax."²⁹

From its start, F/C has gotten a roller coaster ride of controversy in America. Recent media attention has been negative. Public television's *Frontline* was critical in an October 1993 feature,

²³ James McLean, "Facilitated Communication: Some Thoughts on Biklen's and Calculator's Interaction," *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 1, no. 2, 27.

²⁴ Cabay, "Controlled Evaluation of Facilitated Communication," 524.

²⁵ Rimland, "F/C Under Siege," *Autism Research Review International*, 7, no. 1, 2.

²⁶ Biklen, "Communication Unbound," 293-294.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 298.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 293.

²⁹ Vázquez, "Multitask Controlled Evaluation," 374.

followed by bad publicity from the *New York Times* and *60 Minutes* in February 1994. In April 1994, *20/20* aired a segment suspicious of the procedure.³⁰ Also in 1993, however, an F/C newsletter in Texas carried the headline, “Facilitated Communication Sweeps Through Texas Like Wildfire,” and the Virginia General Assembly mandated statewide use of F/C for the disabled.³¹ In March 1993, both *Newsday* and *Readers Digest* published positive articles on F/C.³²

F/C has had less luck in the courts. In 1993, a New York court ruled F/C validity cases would be decided by individually testing for “communicative ability,” rather than using the “Frye Hearing” method, by which the court decides validity based on the testimony of experts in the field.³³ Biklen himself, Syracuse University, and some Syracuse school districts, are charged in suits from several families claiming false allegations due to F/C.³⁴ Lawsuits abound in other states.

Even the professional community opened fire on F/C. The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry criticized F/C as “not a scientifically valid technique. . . . [I]nformation obtained via F/C should not be used to confirm or deny allegations of abuse or to make diagnosis or treatment decisions.”³⁵ This statement later gained indorsement from the American Academy of Pediatrics. The American Association on Mental Retardation issued a similar statement and, at its August 1994 convention, the American Psychological Association passed an anti-F/C resolution stating F/C is an unproven procedure with no scientific support.³⁶ These organizations based their condemnation largely

³⁰ Rimland, “Update on F/C,” *Autism Research Review International*, 8, no. 1, 7.

³¹ Rimland, “Facilitated Communication Update: The Paradox Continues,” *Autism Research Review International*, 7, no. 2, 7.

³² Rimland, “F/C Under Siege,” 7, no. 1, 2.

³³ Rimland, “Facilitated Communication Update,” 7.

³⁴ Rimland, “Update on F/C,” 7

³⁵ Rimland, “Major Medical, Psychological Groups Say F/C Not a Scientifically Valid Technique,” *Autism Research Review International*, 8, no. 2, 2.

on the forty-three experiments done to date. Gina Green, of the New England Center for Autism, has been tracking F/C in the professional literature for years. Experimentally tested on 334 subjects, F/C has not been proven for 316 and failed completely in thirty-four of the forty-three studies.³⁷

But even Biklen spoke favorably of the setup of a recent study by Don Cardinal. Cardinal specifically designed the experiment to be quantitative, yet avoid those procedures Biklen criticized in previous studies. As Cardinal put it, he wanted to develop a protocol "to capture facilitated communication, not suppress it."³⁸ Cardinal tried to honor Biklen's belief that facilitation allows the individual to overcome the "apparent problem of confidence that people with autism seem to experience."³⁹ However, Cardinal did no more or less in his study than the other researchers presented here to ensure use of the steps of F/C Biklen highlighted: provide physical support and initial training, keep focused, avoid testing for competence, generalize facilitators, then fade support.⁴⁰

The "avoid testing for competence" step is the one most experimenters take issue with, because it means assuming the ability is there while trying to see if it is. Of course, the facilitator not the experimenter has to believe this; but why? Calculator digs at similar questions. Why are different levels of "support" necessary for the same individual at different times and for different individuals with the same facilitator? Is the contact only a sign of emotional support, or is it wholly irrelevant?⁴¹ McLean does

³⁶ Rimland, "F/C Update: APA Takes Stand," *Autism Research Review International*, 8, no. 3, 7.

³⁷ Rimland, "F/C Update: Critical PBS Program Adds to Controversy," *Autism Research Review International*, 7, no. 4, 7.

³⁸ Rimland, "Facilitated Communication: Long-Awaited Study Reported," *Autism Research Review International*, 8, no. 2, 2.

³⁹ Biklen, "Typing to Talk," 16.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴¹ Calculator, "Perhaps the Emperor Has Clothes After All: A Response to Biklen," *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 1, no. 2, 18.

not see Biklen's "qualitative" research as being carried out in an emotionally charged atmosphere not conducive to objective evaluation, as Calculator does. He does agree, however, that Biklen's procedures and results have been reported anecdotally and have been tough for clinicians to replicate.⁴²

Understandably, more so than the issue of emotional support levels, what researchers have zeroed in on is whether or not the subject can give answers the facilitator does not know. Sometimes a lot depends on this very point. The Hudson (*et al.*) experiment was designed to assess the validity of the facilitated communication of a twenty-nine-year-old severely mentally retarded woman who alleged sexual assault by a care giver.⁴³ This study used four sets of ten questions. The baseline set the facilitator verbally asked the subject; assisted with the Canon Communicator, she replied. The next three sets were given by tape recorder into earphones on the facilitator and subject. For set B, each heard the same question; for C, different questions, and for D the subject heard questions while the facilitator heard music.⁴⁴ Bligh and Kupperman's purpose was also to validate F/C for a court case. A ten-year-old blind girl with severe mental retardation and autistic-like symptoms, accused her mother's fiancé of sexual abuse.⁴⁵

The purpose of the Regal, Rooney, and Wandas experiment was to "assess the presence of the most rudimentary elements of F/C."⁴⁶ They had the teacher show the subject the stimulus card, then the teacher left the room and the facilitator entered, to ask questions about the card shown. All questions had to do with shape, color, and number.⁴⁷ Vázquez's experiment was not as simply laid out. She

⁴² McLean, "Some Thoughts on Biklen's and Calculator's Interaction," 25.

⁴³ Alan Hudson, Beatrice Melita, and Nicky Arnold, "Brief Report: A Case Study Assessing the Validity of Facilitated Communication," *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 23, no. 1, 166.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 167-168.

⁴⁵ Bligh and Kupperman, "Evaluation Procedure Accepted in a Court Case," 554.

⁴⁶ Robert A. Regal, John R. Rooney, and Teresa Wandas, "Facilitated Communication: An Experimental Evaluation," *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 24, no. 3, 347.

combined object and picture identification with video comprehension, and used only two subjects, Ben and Eva. Each answered questions about five picture cards that both they and their facilitators saw, then ten only they saw, then five more “nonblind.” Ben watched three short videos and Eva two, each “selected for redundancy.”⁴⁸ They were then asked broad questions about what they saw in the videos. The twenty questions on common household objects were presented in the same five blind/ten non-blind/five blind order as the pictures, but to Eva only and in the form of a show-and-tell-like game.⁴⁹

Cabay’s stated purpose was similar to the ones above: to test F/C output as authentic or influenced communication.⁵⁰ Her impetus was the “unexpected literacy” Biklen reported, and its implication that autistic children have highly developed general knowledge just waiting to be tapped. Despite her awareness that his claim runs counter to Biklen’s observation that autistic individuals have “extreme word-finding difficulties,” she nonetheless designed her study of four adolescent boys with autism and severe mental retardation to be open-ended fill-in. Cabay even developed a “prompt hierarchy” to keep the subjects on task when they gave no answer or an unclear one (a random string of letters).⁵¹ The facilitators were an occupational therapist and her aid; both had been facilitating with the subjects for at least six months. With the facilitator out of the room, the experimenter showed and read aloud to each subject twenty cards in turn; ten were blank. When the facilitator returned, the experimenter left the room until the facilitator determined the question was answered.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 349.

⁴⁸ Vázquez, “Multitask Controlled Evaluation,” 371.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 372.

⁵⁰ Cabay, “Controlled Evaluation of Facilitated Communication,” 517.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 520.

Smith's (*et al.*) experiment had a slightly different purpose: to assess the levels of both facilitator knowledge and assistance on the output.⁵² Ten autistic subjects with a range of mental retardation and verbal ability from nonverbal to a vocabulary of less than ten words were given six sessions—three each with two facilitators. Other details of this experiment's method were already given (see pages 4-5).

Although the abstract to the article on Biklen's trip to DEAL in Australia calls it a "rich qualitative study,"⁵³ it is difficult to view it as an experiment since it reads like none of the other seven. Biklen attributes this difference to Crossley's presumption of her subjects' ability, but his table of "Facilitated Communication Practices" gives a truer reason. Points 14 and 15 under "Curriculum" state: do not test the person and give him or her a choice of work to do. Here he warns against asking testing questions like, "Is this a cup or a dollar bill?"⁵⁴

Crossley's belief in her students' ability to learn and to express themselves may be unique for F/C, but it is not unique among Special Education professionals, many of whom are using F/C in schools. McLean concedes not all empirical evidence is gained in the laboratory, and not all truth is found in formal research.⁵⁵ But he adds, despite Biklen's assertion that both are grounded in theory, the main reason to push for objective versus qualitative research is if results do not follow it, a notion will be discarded.

Positive results are lacking. Even the Cardinal study showed mixed results.⁵⁶ With the facilitators blind, each of the forty-three subjects were shown one of a hundred single-word flashcards,

⁵² Smith, *et al.*, "Effects of Facilitator Knowledge," 357.

⁵³ Biklen, "Communication Unbound," 291.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 307.

⁵⁵ McLean, "Some Thoughts on Biklen's and Calculator's Interaction," 27.

⁵⁶ Rimland, "Long-Awaited Study Reported," 2.

in five trials, three times per week. After six weeks, forty-eight percent correctly typed the word shown at least two times in five; a third were able to produce the word three times in five.⁵⁷

The other studies looked at do not come close to this modest success rate. Even the Hudson (*et al.*) and Bligh/Kupperman looks at F/C in court cases were disappointing. For Hudson's "Condition A," in which the subject and facilitator heard the same question (without earphones), the subject was right eight of ten times. When this condition was repeated with earphones, the subject answered four right. But for conditions in which the facilitator heard music, different questions, or did not know the answer (the questions supplied by the subject's family), the subject answered none correctly.⁵⁸ Bligh and Kupperman's results went much the same. Wrong answers were typed for all questions which only the subject knew the answers to. Questions the facilitator knew the reply for were correctly answered.⁵⁹ The court acquitted in both cases, deciding the facilitator was the communication source.

Other cases, with far less riding on their outcomes, have ended similarly. The Regal (*et al.*) study of nineteen subjects with an age range of twenty-three to fifty and various handicapping conditions, resulted in a percent of correct responses at chance level or lower.⁶⁰

Vázquez' results with Ben and Eva are not so easy to explain due to her multimedia format. In the picture identification segment, Both Ben and Eva correctly spelled out the ten nonblind and Ben was incorrect on all ten blind identifications, though Eva correctly labeled two. The answers Eva gave about her two videos bore no relationship to what was shown. (Shown a video of a woman painting, she said it was about a man building a fort.) Of Ben's three videos, he answered correctly about one, partially right

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁸ Hudson, *et al.*, "Assessing the Validity of Facilitated Communication," 170.

⁵⁹ Bligh and Kupperman, "Evaluation Procedure Accepted in a Court Case," 556.

⁶⁰ Regal, *et al.*, "Experimental Evaluation," 350.

about another, and vaguely about the third. This and the fact that Eva was correct on nine of ten blind and nine of ten nonblind while naming household objects says much for the level of interest affecting outcome. After all, Eva's last comment regarding her second video was, 'IT WAS BOERUING [boring].'⁶¹ But with her object identification played as a "stump the experimenter" game, Eva's level of attention was high. In fact, on three of these trials Eva pushed the facilitator away and typed independently.

Of the 110 answers Cabay's four subjects supplied, fifty-two were with the facilitator aware of the correct answer. They answered forty-nine of this fifty-two correctly, contrasted with eleven of the fifty-eight blind cards correct. Twenty-nine of the forty-seven incorrect blind answers were correct answers to different cards (including seven the subjects had not yet gotten to). Ten of the eleven correct were identifying blank cards.

The Smith, Haas, and Belcher results were discussed already (on pages 4 and 5) and were similar to an earlier study Smith and Belcher did in which F/C validation failed for 8 subjects.⁶² Of course, not all results are as negative as those cited here. In her chapter "Who Said That?" Crossley gives several pages of verified, if anecdotal, supporting examples.⁶³ The 1989 "Intellectual Disabilities Review Panel" investigation into Crossley's work came away with mixed results, validating "the assisted communication technique" for four of six clients.⁶⁴ However, this study also mentioned some subjects were more open to cueing than others, right answers tended to be nonspecific, and facilitators were unaware of their influence.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Vázquez, "Multitask Controlled Evaluation," 377.

⁶² Smith, *et al.*, "Effects of Facilitator Knowledge," 358.

⁶³ Crossley, *Facilitated Communication Training*, 85-91.

⁶⁴ Biklen, "Communication Unbound," 299.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 299.

Biklen acknowledged this on-again/off-again ability and willingness to participate by the students causes many to view F/C as “no more real than a Ouija board.”⁶⁶ It is Calculator and McLean, in their articles grouped with Biklen’s, who provide the direction for future F/C validation. Calculator breaks down areas for future study to three: what is unique about the method, what factors lead to success, and which ones are inconsequential.⁶⁷ He says the smart route is to find out who F/C is effective for to determine how it can be presented best. McLean adds F/C is attractive for autism because of the inconsistent success of previous approaches.⁶⁸ If we can separate the “whys” of successful communication from the “why nots” among those for whom F/C does not work, empiricism will win out.

Considering the academic research done to date, empiricism certainly stands a better chance of winning than F/C does. Cardinal’s moderate success and the success Vázquez had with Eva give hope and at least show F/C can have an impact. However, the process is miles from Biklen’s claims of independent communication and farther still from “instant literacy.” Rimland distinguishes two types of communication. Type I consists of simple one- or two-word answers, usually after much training and experience. Type II is the use of unexpected vocabulary and insightful prose; it occurs almost instantly.⁶⁹ Of the more than three hundred subjects reported in various experiments tracked by Green, only about fifty have shown Type I communicative ability and none have been Type II yet.⁷⁰ However, even this bit of success with formerly nonverbal autistic subjects—though not up to the level Biklen claims—does, as he says, make rethinking autism as a social/cognitive disability worthwhile.⁷¹ Because Calculator has

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 299.

⁶⁷ Calculator, “A Response to Biklen,” 19.

⁶⁸ McLean, “Some Thoughts on Biklen’s and Calculator’s Interaction,” 26.

⁶⁹ Rimland, “Long-Awaited Study Reported,” 2.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷¹ Biklen, “Typing to Talk,” 17.

worked with subjects whose social and verbal competencies defy the classical concept of autism, and has facilitated with subjects who were definitely doing the communicating, he agrees with Biklen on this point.⁷² Based on his previous research findings postulating “symptom” behaviors (from withdrawal to hyperactivity) may be related to the individual’s inability to be understood, Calculator suggests for many autistic people the diagnosis may be secondary to their adoption of compensatory behaviors in the absence of more effective means of communication.⁷³ This would account for not only the behaviors, but for the ability of many autistic individuals to communicate above historically expected levels. This is not to say, however, that facilitation will work with every client, or even every autistic individual. That was Biklen’s hope early on, that facilitation would lead to diminished autistic behaviors, which would lead to mainstreaming (now called “inclusion”) in schools and in the work force.⁷⁴ As early as 1991, however, he began to adjust this idealistic goal while having trouble coming up with a strategy to teach F/C to “higher functioning” autistic people.⁷⁵ He found it ironic that the more severely mentally retarded autistic students picked up the method quicker. Although this could be attributed to what the *DSM4* says about higher-functioning autistic individuals having better receptive than expressive communicative abilities,⁷⁶ the contrast better fits the critics’ claims F/C is not communication at all, but manipulation. Those mentally retarded as well are generally more easily led than the higher functioning autistic individuals. Very often, though, the high-functioning individuals have some verbal ability and this may contribute to their unwillingness to endure F/C.

⁷² Calculator, “A Response to Biklen,” 18.

⁷³ Calculator, “Calculator Responds,” 24.

⁷⁴ Biklen, “Communication Unbound,” 312.

⁷⁵ Schubert, *Resource Guide*, A-1.

⁷⁶ *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*, 4th ed., 67.

Crossley is more relentless about F/C than even Biklen. About clients that do not seem to get the process she says, “[you] may not have proved that he or she can communicate. You certainly have not proved that they cannot ever communicate.”⁷⁷ Vázquez posits two not so insidious conjectures about failure at F/C: the subjects may be typing words they know willy-nilly, or they may be starting words with the facilitator attempting to complete the thought.⁷⁸ This notion, from an F/C critic, ties in with what most have against the practice. Besides the idea of “avoiding testing,” what those not supportive of F/C find the most troublesome is that the pro-F/C faction seems to have forgotten F/C is intended as a training method whose goal is independent communication. As a means to this end, the articles coming out of Syracuse since 1993 have begun to address independent typing and mitigating the facilitator’s influence.

However, F/C research is still at the stage in which it stirs up more questions than it answers. Areas for further study include the effect of age differences in subjects. Most studies have lumped together subjects with a wide range of ages. This distinction is especially relevant to autism since “[t]he nature of the impairment in social interaction may change over time in Autistic Disorder.”⁷⁹ It is also important to study the young and old separately in light of Biklen’s observation that it is the children’s language development that is surprisingly precocious.⁸⁰ Similarly, it would be useful to have results on F/C with autism alone, rather than mixed with cerebral palsy (as one study included did) and mental retardation (as all but one study did).

This last call stems from reasons more personal than experimental. From the dozens of autistic individuals I have been around and the two I live with every day, I have a theory of my own. Mental

⁷⁷ Crossley, *Facilitated Communication Training*, 92.

⁷⁸ Vázquez, “Multitask Controlled Evaluation,” 374.

⁷⁹ *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*, 4th ed., 68.

⁸⁰ Schubert, *Resource Guide*, A-1.

retardation is often diagnosed with autism because the intelligence quotient tests that define MR are heavily based on verbal ability. I am not saying the two have nothing in common, but far less than is currently tested for. I am saying we have to be careful with F/C, or any "new" technology used with the disabled, to guard against the easy notion that access rights should increase with the technology to implement them. For the unrealistic hopes the technology raises in their care givers and the damage its misuse can do to those disabled, caution is the wisest course.

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