

F/C: What's going on?

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Autism, there are three additional large-scale formal studies of facilitated communication which have been completed, but for which the reports are not yet available. These studies are by Holmes et al. in New Jersey, by Eberlin et al. in New York, and by Szempruch and Jacobson, also in New York. The Holmes study utilized 40 autistic subjects, the Eberlin study used 21 autistic subjects, and the Szempruch and Jacobson study used 23 retarded subjects. None of the 84 subjects in these latter three studies were able to communicate via F/C.

The only study I am aware of which reports any positive findings for the F/C concept was published as a "letter to the editor" by Calculator and Snyder. Only two of the five boys in their study showed higher IQ scores when facilitated. (Facilitated assessment, not facilitated communication?) Despite this mildly quasi-positive finding, Calculator has advised ARRI that "I have absolutely no doubt that the large majority of those using F/C will not be able to demonstrate the abilities that have been claimed for them."

It is unfortunate that Biklen's new newsletter, "The Facilitated Communication Digest," dated November 1992, makes no mention of the O.D. Heck study, nor of any of the other studies. These are matters of great public interest, and should be discussed freely and openly.

Frankly, I am surprised by the uniformly negative findings of the research studies and court-ordered evaluations of F/C in individual cases. In the past, when pressed to guess what percentage of non-speaking autistic persons could communicate by writing, I have generally replied 5% to 10% at most. However, the number appears smaller than that. (Biklen formerly responded "100%," when asked this question, but recently he has been quoted as saying 90% to 95%.)

While the most salient finding from the

research is that it has failed to demonstrate (thus far) that non-speaking persons can communicate through F/C, the concomitant finding is of extraordinary importance and should not be overlooked: F/C responses have consistently been shown to emanate from the facilitator. We here at ARI continue to receive report after report (3 in one recent week) from horribly traumatized parents and teachers who have been accused of sexual and other abuses via F/C. In California a teacher faces 90 years in prison if F/C-based reports that he molested 4 teenage boys in his class are judged true. In New York, a family has incurred \$50,000 in legal expenses fighting off (successfully) abuse charges. In Washington, funds that would have been used for retirement, and for sending the autistic daughter's normal sibling through college, have been exhausted in a legal battle by the parents' efforts to stay out of jail. In New Hampshire, an accused father has had to find make-shift living arrangements for five and a half months because of a court order forcing him out of his home. It does not make sense: why would a parent risk a long prison sentence by permitting F/C to be used if he or she were really abusing a child?

When allegations of physical or sexual abuse against a child are made, the usual rule "innocent until proven guilty" does not apply. For this and other reasons, all those involved with providing facilitated communication should be exceedingly careful. Carol Berger, of Oregon, who independently discovered F/C in 1987, and, having conducted over 20,000 F/C sessions in the U.S. and overseas, is probably the most experienced F/C teacher in the world, tells me that not once in all of her experience has she encountered any communication alleging misconduct.

What is going on? Where do we go from here? I certainly don't know, but I will be watching the situation with keen interest. Readers of the ARRI may be assured that they will be kept abreast of further developments.

F/C devices available

The Canon Communicator, which has been widely used in the practice of facilitated communication, costs about \$1,000, which puts it beyond the means of many families who would like to try F/C.

Recently the Brother International Corporation has requested advice from the Autism Research Institute regarding the usefulness of their P-Touch Electronic Labeling device for possible use in F/C. We found, as did the other individuals and organizations Brother consulted, that the P-Touch Labeling system would not only serve this purpose, but that it had several advantages over the Canon Communicator, in that it has an LCD display and correction capabilities, in addition to a printout. Further, the Brother P-Touch costs only about one sixth as much as a Canon Communicator.

One disadvantage of the Brother P-Touch is that it does not have a keyboard cover or guard to permit only one letter at a time to be pressed. Brother is looking into the possibility of manufacturing a simple plastic guard that can be secured to the P-Touch keyboard. If Brother does produce a guard, we will announce its availability in the ARRI.

The P-Touch is available at many consumer electronic stores and discount houses for approximately \$150.

An even less expensive device that might be helpful in assisting a non-speaking person to communicate has been available from the Autism Research Institute since 1986. Long before F/C became popular, we arranged for the production of communication mitts, which are white cloth mittens resembling a pot holder or barbecue glove, on which are printed the letters of the alphabet, numbers, the words "yes" and "no," and other symbols which can be pointed to by a non-speaking person who might thus be able to communicate. These mittens are portable, washable, do not break when dropped, and do not require batteries. They are available from ARI, free to those who send a donation of \$5.00 or more (tax-deductible), and provide \$1.00 postage.

Autism and chemotherapy

During the past few years ARI has been contacted by several families whose autistic children have been treated for leukemia. When the autistic child or adult was given chemotherapy for leukemia, the autism lessened, and the individual became considerably more lucid and able to communicate.

This development requires further investigation. If any readers are aware of similar cases, in which autistic individuals being treated for leukemia or some other form of cancer have shown significant cognitive improvement during treatment, please write to us, providing details of the treatments (e.g., drugs used, dosages), the kinds of cognitive and behavioral changes seen, the duration of the changes, etc.

Update: Auditory Integration Training (AIT)

The latest list of practitioners of Berard-type AIT includes 128 individuals located throughout the U.S., plus 18 in other countries. The list, compiled by the Autism Research Institute, includes those who use the BCG AIT device, as well as those who use the Berard machine. A free copy of the list may be obtained from ARI by sending an SASE marked "AIT list."

For a copy of the list and all available ARI publications on AIT, send \$4.00 and request "AIT package." The package contains the report of the first pilot study of AIT and several other papers.

ARI continues to receive encouraging in-

formal reports from parents who have tried AIT with their autistic children. So far, so good!

The large-scale study of AIT, conducted jointly between ARI and Dr. Stephen Edelson's center in Oregon, is progressing well. Approximately 400 autistic children and adults have been given AIT, and follow-up information is being collected monthly. Two hundred have received AIT with the BCG device, and 200 with the Berard device (50 with the original Berard device and 150 with the newer Berard Audiokintron). Data analysis has begun and first results will be reportable in early 1993.