

Facilitated communication: long-awaited study reported

On May 23, Don Cardinal, of Chapman University, reported the long-awaited results of his study of the validity of facilitated communication (F/C). The study was presented by Cardinal and co-author Darlene Hanson, a communication specialist, at the conference on F/C sponsored by the Syracuse University Facilitated Communication Institute.

The Cardinal study is of special importance in the controversy that has surrounded F/C, not only because it is the largest study yet reported, but also because of the great care that was used in designing and conducting the experiment, so as to avoid the procedures Douglas Biklen and other proponents of F/C have objected to in previous studies.

Cardinal, mindful of the complaints about the previous 43 studies (many completed by proponents of F/C), employed "collaborative action research" in refining his study techniques: "...several school and university professionals observed students using F/C for hundreds of hours within the classroom, collaborated on those observations, developed 'mini'-protocols, tested those protocols under quasi-experimental conditions, collaborated again regarding the results, redesigned the protocol, retested the protocol, etc. The purpose of this process was to develop elements of a protocol that

served to capture facilitated communication rather than suppress it."

The study design:

1. The student was shown a word on a flash card, selected from a list of 100 words.
2. The facilitator entered the room and assisted the student in typing the word the student had just seen.
3. The facilitator said each letter aloud as it was typed, while an assistant recorded each letter, as heard, on a data sheet.
4. The student was praised and the facilitator left the room so the process could be repeated for the next trial.

All training and testing was done in the students' natural and familiar surroundings. Each student was "tested" three times per week for six weeks, each test session consisting of five trials. Biklen has referred to the Cardinal study on a number of occasions as an ideally designed procedure for verifying the reality of F/C.

Results to date, based on 43 subjects, ages 11 to 32, with autism, retardation, and other developmental disabilities: After six weeks of training, 48% correctly typed the word shown to them at least two of the five times. 33% were able to type the word at least three of the five times.

(See next column)

Major medical, psychological groups say F/C not a scientifically valid technique

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, one of the largest professional organizations of psychiatrists in the country, has issued a statement criticizing the widespread use of facilitated communication. The statement was endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

The Academy's statement reads, "Facilitated Communication (FC) is a process by which a 'facilitator' supports the hand or arm of a communicatively impaired individual while using a keyboard or typing device. It has been claimed that this process enables persons with autism or mental retardation to communicate. Studies have

repeatedly demonstrated that F/C is not a scientifically valid technique for individuals with autism or mental retardation. In particular, information obtained via F/C should not be used to confirm or deny allegations of abuse or to make diagnostic or treatment decisions."

The American Association on Mental Retardation has issued a similar statement, and the American Psychological Association is expected to pass an anti-F/C resolution, endorsed by 11 divisions, at its August 1994 convention.

Policy Statement on Facilitated Communication, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 10/30/93. Policy Statement on Facilitated Communication, American Association on Mental Retardation, 6/5/94.

The FDA front: write/call now! (continued from page 1)

tant of all, visit their Congressional representatives, especially Congressmen, to urge, in the strongest possible terms, that the Representatives co-sponsor and/or vote for the legislation proposed by Senator Hatch, Representative Richardson and others that would sharply limit the FDA's right to interfere with the public's longstanding right to buy nutritional supplements without governmental interference. You don't have to go into much detail: con-

tact your Congressperson's office, ask for his or her healthcare assistant, and tell that person (or, preferably, the Congressperson) that you do not trust the FDA and you do not want the FDA to have the right to interfere with your ability to purchase nutritional supplements.

Phone 202-224-3121 to reach the telephone operator for Congress, who will connect you to the right person. Please do it now. Time is short!

Editor's Comments:

Cardinal says his findings are preliminary. It is hoped he will go further, particularly in dealing with word meaning. Copying does not imply understanding. It is, for example, much easier to type "c-o-y" on a keyboard than it is to define "coy" or use it in a sentence.

We wish to congratulate Don Cardinal and his colleagues for designing and undertaking this meticulously conducted study. It is especially interesting that the initial Cardinal study consisted of 43 subjects, fewer than half of whom were able to type a one-word response in at least three of five trials. By remarkable coincidence, Douglas Biklen's initial, but uncontrolled, evaluation of F/C also included 43 subjects. However, 41 of Biklen's 43 were said to have "facilitated." Most were said to be "fluent." What does Biklen mean by fluent? In his book *Communication Unbound*, he describes his meeting with Jonathan, the first autistic person on whom Crossley had tried facilitation. In a typed conversation with Biklen, Jonathan remarks that he was upset because "I got sat on by Rosie." Upon reading this, Crossley asked, "Do you mean that literally or metaphorically?" Jonathan responded by typing, "MET."

F/C: Type I and Type II

The discrepancies between the high-level communication skills reported by Biklen and Crossley, compared with the levels reported by Cardinal, Berger and others, is remarkable. So remarkable, in fact, that it appears that we are looking at two very different phenomena. Facilitated communication Type I, as I call it, consists of simple one- or two-word responses, usually accomplished only after a good deal of training and experience.

Type II facilitated communication, as described by Crossley, Biklen and others, is usually said to occur very quickly, with instant literacy, in the absence of meticulous training in reading. F/C Type II is also said to reflect an extensive vocabulary, consisting of words like "suborn," "metaphorical," "impugn," and so forth, and frequently, profound, insightful and often witty prose.

By now the number of subjects reported in the 44 controlled trials of F/C approaches 400. Of these 400, only about 50 are said to show any ability whatever to "facilitate," and in every controlled trial it has been Type I F/C, rather than Type II F/C which has been seen. Why?

—BR