F/C under siege

During recent months, facilitated communication has come under increasing attack on several fronts:

THE MEDIA. The initial glowing reports about F/C on television and in the print media are giving way to increasingly critical articles emphasizing court-rejected claims of child abuse, reports of impending lawsuits, and negative findings from controlled studies. But not all of the news from the media front is bad: The March *Reader's Digest* carries a very positive story about the remarkable F/C feats of 27-year-old Arthur Wold of Seattle, who had been considered retarded.

A January feature story in *Newsday* which cast doubt on the validity of F/C was followed a few days later by a very positive story by *Newsday* staff writer Barbara Fischkin, who is the mother of an autistic boy. She starts her story with convincing evidence: "Danny, my five-year-old, likes to tell his teachers about the small details of his life. He saw a dead bird. He met a girl named Jill. There was chocolate icing on his mother's birthday cake. His room has three windows—and two beds. 'Are these facts?' his teachers write home. 'Yes! Yes! Yes!' I write back, rejoicing. 'It's all true.'"

While F/C, though embattled, is holding its own on the media front, it is doing noticeably less well elsewhere:

THE RESEARCH FRONT. A rapidly mounting series of formal scientific evaluations of F/C are reaching the publication stage.

Gina Green, Director of Research of the New England Center for Autism, is collecting information on all formal tests of the validity of F/C. The accompanying table summarizes her results as of mid-March, 1993. The single-case studies have generally been conducted as part of legal proceedings, while the multi-case reports represent experimental studies in classroom or therapy room settings. Green makes the following points about the data in her tables:

1. Results were remarkably consistent across different researchers, facilitators, participants and methods. Twenty of the 21 studies showed no evidence of valid F/C. Strong evidence was found that the facilitators were the source of the communications.

2. Most of the participants had been in F/C for extended periods, up to three years, and had been reported to engage in sophisticated high level discourse through F/C.

3. In many cases the facilitators believed strongly they were not influencing the communications. In fact, when personal information was typed during F/C sessions, some facilitators concluded that the participants had telepathic powers.

4. There has been no evidence that participants found the evaluations aversive, demeaning, or stressful. In fact, several investigators have commented upon cheerful, even enthusiastic participation by both clients and facilitators.

THE LEGAL FRONT. As we have reported in several previous issues of the

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Controlled Evaluations of Facilitated Communication

Adapted from a chart by Gina Green, New England Center for Autism

SOURCE	DIAGNOSIS	CONTROL	F/C CONFIRMED
Cummins & Prior (1992), *Harvard Educational Review*			
1. Interdisciplinary Review Panel	?	Questions given to facilitator and participant separately, headphones	0 of 3
2. Catanese	?	Stimuli to be matched shown only to participant	0 of 4
3. Interdisciplinary Working Party	Comatose/ head injured	Analysis of movements of communic. board held by facilitator	0 of 1
4. " " " " "	MR, severe	Same as above	0 of 1
5. Hudson, Melita, & Arnold, 1993, *Journal of Aut. & Dev. Dis.*, 23, 165-173	MR, severe	Questions given to facilitator and participant separately, headphones	0 of 1
6. Moore, Donovan, Hudson, Dykstra, & Lawrence (in prep.), Comm. Serv. Victoria & Royal Melbourne Inst. of Tech.	MR	Questions given to facilitator and participant separately, headphones	0 of 8
7. Hudson (personal communic., Sept. 1992), Melbourne, Australia	MR	Stimuli to be matched or named shown only to participant	0 of 2
8. Bitsiki (personal communic., Sept. 1992), Melbourne, Australia	MR	Questions given to facilitator & participant separately, headphones	0 of 1
9. Green, Chellquist, Krendel-Ames, Ross & MacDonald (in prep.), New England Ctr. for Autism, Southboro, MA	Autistic	Facilit. visual access to keyboard Facilit. knowledge of just-completed activity Match-to-sample and spelling, dictated & printed words/pictures, computer with touchscreen	0 of 3
10. Markowitz, Bomba, & Holmes (in prep.), Eden Institute (Princeton, NJ)	Autistic	Facilitator access (visual & auditory) to numerous test items	0 of 40
11. Wheeler, Jacobson, Paglieri, & Schwartz (1993), *Mental Retardation*, 1, 49-60	Autistic	Pictures presented to facilitator and participant separately; content analyses	0 of 12
12. Shane & Kearns (submitted), Children's Hospital, Boston, MA	MR	Visual and auditory items presented to facilitator and participant separately	0 of 1
13. Beck, Warburg, Parving, Jansen, Arendt-Nielsen, Elbro, & Klewe (1992, IASSMD Conf., Brisbane, Australia)	MR	Facilitator access to answers (also EMG, linguistic fingerprinting)	0 of 17
14. Eberlin, Ibel, Volpe, & McConnachie (submitted), DD Inst., Smithtown, NY	20 autistic and 1 PDD	Facilitator access (visual and auditory) to numerous test items	0 of 21
15. Szempruch & Jacobson, (1992), DD Service Office, Rome, NY	MR	Facilitator knowledge of just-completed activity	0 of 23
16. H. Shane (personal communic., March 1993), Children's Hospital, Boston, MA	MR, autistic	Visual & auditory items presented to facilitator and participant separately	0 of 9
17. Bligh & Kupperman (in press, *Journal of Aut. and Dev. Disorders*)	MR, legally blind	Facilitator access to keyboard, questions, and answers	0 of 1
18. Smith & Belcher (in press, *Journal of Aut. and Dev. Disorders*)	Autistic	No "co-activity" by facilitators*	0 of 8
19. Regal, Rooney, & Wandas (submitted), Young Adult Inst., Tarrytown, NY	Dev. Dis.	Facilitator knowledge of stimuli just seen (multiple choice questions)	0 of 19
20. Calculator & Singer (1992), *Topics in Lang. Disorders*, 13, ix-xvi (letter to editor)	3 autistic 2 MR	Facilitator access to Peabody* Picture Vocabulary Test items	3 of 5
21. Smith, Haas, & Belcher	7 autistic	Visual items shown to facilitator and participant separately, three levels of facilitation	0 of 7
		TOTAL:	**3 of 187**

**Control procedures not clearly specified*