

## Facilitated Communication update: the paradox continues

**WIDESPREAD ENTHUSIASM.** Enthusiastic acceptance of facilitated communication continues throughout the U.S., with little regard for the storm clouds gathering on the scientific and legal fronts.

—A May conference on F/C brought 1,000 enthusiastic, cheering, clapping, and sometimes crying supporters to Syracuse.

—A Texas F/C newsletter carries a banner headline, "Facilitated Communication Sweeps Through Texas Like Wildfire."

—The General Assembly of Virginia has mandated F/C for use with the handicapped throughout the state.

**ON THE RESEARCH FRONT.** Meanwhile, the research studies continue to yield results which are almost uniformly negative. The last issue of ARRI presented a table summarizing 21 research studies, compiled primarily by Gina Green, all but one of which showed that under controlled conditions, non-speaking handicapped persons failed to answer simple questions correctly unless the answer was known to the facilitator. With Dr. Green's assistance, ARRI now reports the summarized results of five additional studies (see table).

With the addition of these new reports, there are now 26 controlled studies of F/C, totalling 218 subjects, only two of which (four subjects) offer evidence of communicative skill, via F/C, in the non-speaking handicapped population. Every one of the 218 subjects had been reported to be skilled at communication via F/C, and in every case great care was exercised to make the testing friendly and congenial, rather than confrontational. Usually the autistic person had no way of knowing exactly what the facilitator was asked during the testing, so the testees' failure to answer the questions correctly, except when the answer was known to the facilitator, cannot logically be attributed to non-compliance or resistance on the part of the testee, nor to difficulty in "word-finding."

Perhaps in response to the pressure from the rapidly increasing series of scientific studies, Douglas Biklen has moderated his claims for F/C. Whereas in his earlier papers he had asserted that virtually 100% of all non-speaking autistic persons could communicate via F/C, in an article in the May, 1993 TASH Newsletter, he says that F/C "can be useful for *many* people who do not speak, or whose speech is highly limited (e.g., echoed, repetitive, limited to one, two or three word utterances) and who *cannot point independently and reliably*" [our italics]. Until now, F/C doctrine has held that F/C should also be used with the speaking handicapped, and that in such cases their facilitated rather than their spoken communication should be given credence.

Further, whereas Biklen formerly held that autistic persons had such extraordinary peripheral vision and/or spatial memory that they could type while looking at people or objects nowhere near the keyboard, he now says, in the same article, "monitoring to ensure that individuals look

at the keyboard or other target" is an "important aspect" of F/C.

Perhaps there is yet hope that the F/C advocates and the F/C researchers can resolve their differences. But perhaps not: in the Spring, 1993 *Clinical Connection*, Judith Duchan, of the State University of New York at Buffalo, states, "Before F/C, I thought I knew what I was doing; since F/C everything is up in the air. Before F/C, I called myself a scientist; since F/C I have become a skeptic about scientific methods."

**ON THE LEGAL FRONT.** In ARRI 7/1 we mentioned several planned lawsuits by parents and professionals who claim to have been injured by false allegations made via F/C. The legal documents have now been served in three cases, and several more suits are in preparation. Lawsuits are already underway in Los Angeles, San Jose, and Indianapolis. Each of the suits names school districts,

principals, school officials, teachers, counselors and others as defendants. Each suit asks for approximately two million dollars in damages. Other parents and professionals who have been accused of abuse via F/C are organizing into self-help support networks, and some are planning a nationwide class action suit (see Letters).

In Massachusetts, William Capps was freed, after nine months in jail for alleged sexual abuse, when the judge concluded, after extensive testing and testimony, that the autistic person was not capable of communication.

In New York, a court decided that the validity of F/C should be decided on a case by case basis, by testing the communicative ability of the disabled person, rather than by the use of the "Frye Hearing." In a Frye Hearing, a court decides whether or not a method, such as F/C, is generally regarded as valid by professionals in that field.

### Controlled Evaluations of Facilitated Communication

Compiled with the assistance of Gina Green, Shriver Center for Mental Retardation, MA

#### SUMMARY OF TABLE I FROM ARRI 7/1 (12/92)

TOTAL	F/C CONFIRMED	F/C FAILED
STUDIES: 21	1	20
SUBJECTS: 187	3	184

#### F/C STUDY RESULTS CONT'D—TABLE II: UPDATE AS OF MAY 1993

SOURCE	DIAGNOSIS	CONTROL	F/C CONFIRMED
22. Kallstrom, Piazza, Hunt, & Owen (May 1993, Assoc. for Behav. Analysis Convention)	2 autistic	Visual items presented to facilitator & participant separately	0 of 2
23. Teodoro, Meinhold, & Koch (May 1993, Assoc. for Behav. Analysis Convention)	2 autistic 1 CP	Facilitator knowledge of just-completed activities	0 of 3
24. Price, Kirkpatrick & Saxe (May 1993, Assoc. for Behav. Analysis Convention)	1 autistic	Facilitator knowledge of access to test items presented visually	1 of 1
25. Calculator & Hatch (personal communication)	15 autistic and MR	Facilitator knowledge of variety of stimuli, experiences	0 of 15
26. Smith, Haas and Belcher (personal communication)	10 autistic and MR	3 levels of assistance, 3 levels of information, 2 facilitators	0 of 10
<b>TOTAL:</b>			<b>4 OF 218</b>

## Recently published . . .

**THE BIOLOGY OF THE AUTISTIC SYNDROMES**, Second Edition; Christopher Gillberg, M.D., and Mary Coleman, M.D. Best and most comprehensive medical text on autism. Includes known disorders causing or related to autism, checklist of recommended laboratory tests, and much more. Mac Keith Press, 1992; hardback, 317 pages, \$64.95.

**HEARING EQUALS BEHAVIOR**, Guy Berard, M.D. First English translation of important book on auditory integration training of patients with autism and other disorders. With Preface by B. Rimland, Afterword by A. Siehli. Keats, 1993, paperback, 178 pages, \$17.95.

Both books are available from the Autism Research Institute. Add \$2.50 per book, for postage and handling; California residents add 7.5% sales tax.