

LETTERS

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questioning and you may discover how and why F/C works and how it doesn't and that may do us all a service—the critics, the supporters and the autistic people themselves.

Donna Williams
London, England

To the Editor:

I am increasingly concerned about the argument being used by F/C proponents that if a child eventually learns to type independently, that proves the F/C was valid. I think this is a gross misconception.

My daughter types independently, and I taught her how by holding her hand until she figured out the keyboard—but *that doesn't mean that those hand-over-hand "typing lessons" were valid communication.* What we were doing wasn't F/C, but prompted typing.

I once had a piano teacher show me a chord by placing my fingers on the correct keys. He gradually "faded" this prompting, and eventually I could play the chord myself. But that doesn't mean that I actually knew the chord when I was being "facilitated!" Now, if he'd insisted on continuing to place my fingers on the keys each time, eventually I *would* know the chord—and he'd be guilty of over-prompting a task that I was capable of doing independently.

I'd be willing to bet that most "valid" cases of F/C are, quite simply, cases of *overprompted teaching*—one of the easiest mistakes to make with autistic children. If the initial goal had been to teach children to type, both the initial technique (hand-over-hand prompting) and the end result (independent typing) would be the same—but the children would probably become independent much faster, and no one would assume that anything mystical had happened.

It's time to fire the facilitators and bring in typing teachers!

Mary Hall
New York, NY

Typing, magnesium for hyperacuity, etc.

To the Editor:

I am writing to report a wonderful keyboard system that my daughter has used for the last nine days. It's called the Herzog system of keyboarding and it was so successful that my daughter now types instead of dictating to me. In one hour, she learned a strategy that made sense to her. There are also additional bumpy hub keys which stick onto any keyboard to help orient the hands in the correct position. [For information, contact Herzog Research, 1433 E. Broadway, Tucson, AZ 85719, 602-792-2550.]

I would also recommend typing programs that speak the words or letters being typed. My daughter has found this feature quite useful and there are many products out there now.

Leslie Wagstaff
Oakland, CA

To the Editor:

Parents who are having difficulty toilet training their autistic children might want to order a videotape titled "It's Potty Time" from the Duke University Pediatrics Department. The tape costs \$19.99 plus \$3.95 postage and handling, and may be ordered by calling 1-800-23-POTTY.

We were having difficulty toilet training our five-year-old autistic youngster, but the problem resolved itself very quickly after we started using the tape. Our son began singing the songs from the tape, and within a few days had toilet trained himself.

Norman and Sandra McLure
Williston, VT

To the Editor:

Our son suffered from hyperacute hearing. We had noted that in certain locations he would cover his ears although we were not able to detect any noise. He would complain that sounds from air conditioners or neon lights bothered him.

Having read your suggestion to try magnesium, we consulted our doctor. She prescribed magnesium glucoheptonate, 2 ml per day. Within 14 days we noted a difference. He stopped covering his ears and complaining about noises. [In] locations where we had noted this behavior in the past we found that he no longer found the sound bothersome. We also noted an improvement in his speech, communication, and coordination.

My husband and I are very pleased with Brian's progress and thankful that we came across the article.

Helen O'Hara
Canada

To the Editor:

HELP! I am a volunteer at a clinic that deals with autism and am working with an 11-year-old boy who, six months ago, started to refuse to take any food or liquid. He will let nothing pass his throat. He will often put a whole plate of food in his mouth as if eating normally, except that when it comes time to swallow, he simply spits the food out. Further, he is constantly spitting. At the clinic (after having ruled out a physical ailment) they use behavior modification therapy and are making painfully slow progress. I asked him, "Does it hurt your lips (gums, teeth, throat, etc.)?" and he responds, "No." Yet he is scared to death of anything being swallowed. He will also vomit if any food is passed down.

I have gone to the university library where I am finishing a Master's, and punched into the computer "autism and dysphagia." I get tons on both but a zero on the screen for the two together. Can it be that there is nothing in the literature on autistic people with dysphagia? Any help you could offer would be greatly appreciated.

Ben Wolfson
6900 Dorset Place, Baltimore, MD 21215

Editor's Note: In ARRI 3/1, we summarized a successful treatment program for an autistic child who refused all solid food; we have sent the information to you. In the meantime—any suggestions from our readers?

Editor's Notebook

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deaths per year from the use of nutritional supplements, it is obvious that the FDA should be spending our tax dollars on policing the pharmaceutical industry, and not the supplement industry.

Please call and write your Congressmen and Senators frequently to remind them of your position on this matter. Call the Congressional operator at (202) 224-3121 and ask for your Senator's or Representative's health affairs aide.

Update on F/C

In New York several families have initiated 10-million-dollar lawsuits against facilitators, school districts, Douglas Biklen and Syracuse University, claiming damages arising from false allegations of sexual abuse, made through facilitated communication. A recent newspaper account mentions that several additional multi-million-dollar lawsuits against Syracuse University and Professor Biklen are in preparation.

In the meantime, negative coverage of F/C has appeared in the *New York Times* (Feb. 12, 1994) and on *60 Minutes* (Feb. 20, 1994). *20/20* has scheduled an F/C segment for April 22.

In the last issue of ARRI we summarized controlled studies number 36 through 43. Of the 334 subjects used in these studies, only 18 were found, under controlled conditions, to show any sign of communication, and none of the 18 was able to do more than communicate very short, one- or two-word answers. No new studies have been reported.

In his December 1993 F/C newsletter, Biklen mentions several recent studies as showing positive results for F/C. ARRI contacted the authors of these studies. Carol Vazquez, of the State University of New York at New Paltz, told ARRI that Biklen had seriously misrepresented her work. One of her two subjects was unable to identify any of the 10 pictures shown to him when the facilitator did not know what pictures the child was looking at, while he got all 10 pictures right when the facilitator did know the correct answers. The other child got all 10 answers correct when the facilitator knew what pictures the child was looking at, but got only 2 out of 10 correct when the facilitator did not know the right answers.

Another study mentioned by Biklen in his December newsletter as providing positive results was authored by Don Cardinal, of Chapman University in California. Dr. Cardinal has informed ARRI that his study is not complete. Results will not be available until May.

Howard Shane, of the Boston Children's Hospital, called the attention of ARRI to Biklen's statement in 1990 that, when he visited Australia in 1988 and 1989, he had seen a dozen autistic children communicating independently. Shane noted that in a 1992 paper, Rosemary Crossley stated that the first case of independent typing was seen in Australia in 1991, after years of effort. A puzzling discrepancy!