

Research Supporting Authorship

Biklen, D. & Cardinal, D. (Eds.) (1997). *Contested words, contested science: Unraveling the facilitated communication controversy.* New York: Teachers College Press.

A collection of studies (controlled, quantitative ones as well as qualitative investigations) of facilitation, focusing mainly on the authorship question: Who is doing the typing: the facilitator or the person with the communication impairment? The book includes a chapter by Marcus and Shevin in which Marcus, an FC user, replicates a classic facilitated communication authorship test.

Biklen, D., Saha, N., & Kliever, C. (1995). **How teachers confirm authorship of facilitated communication.** *Journal of the Association for persons with Severe Handicaps, 20, 45-56.*

A qualitative examination of the authorship question, examining authorship of all students (17) in several school settings who were using facilitation: “Teachers provided and described evidence for 13 of the 17 students of message passing skills (i.e., typing information not known to their facilitators that could be verified as accurate). The teachers noted that 3 of these 13 and 4 of the total 17 achieved some independent typing beyond typing their names and the date. Sixteen of the 17 students were judged by their teachers to have confirmed their typing/communication ability by virtue of other features: unique physical characteristics in typing or pointing, personal themes, recurring phrases, and stylistic qualities. These features appeared in their individual work but not in others, even though several shared facilitators” (p. 45.).

Beukelman, D.R. & Mirenda, P. (1998). *Augmentative and alternative communication: Management of severe communication disorders in children and adults.* Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 327-329.

“Sharisa (a facilitated communication user) joins a small group of people around the world who began communicating through FC and are now able to type either independently or with minimal, hand-on-shoulder support. There can be no doubt that, for them, FC „worked,” in that it opened the door to communication for the first time. In addition, hundreds (or even thousands) of individuals use FC with physical support. To many observers, it does not seem clear whether or not these individuals are authoring their own messages. Thus, FC has become controversial and hotly contested as a valid and reliable technique (e.g., Green & Shane, 1994). We include FC here because of Sharisa Kochmeister, Lucy Blachman, Larry Bissonnette, and others who now communicate fluently and independently, thanks to FC. For them, the controversy has ended” (p. 327).

Bundschuh, K. & Basler-Eggen, A. (2000). **Abschlussbericht zur Studie, Getutzte Kommunikation bei Menschen mit schweren Kommunikationsstorwigen.** Munich: Bayerisches Staatsministerium fur Arbeit und Sozialordnung, Familie, Fauen und Gesundheit.

“Individually six students (of 7) have unequivocally proven cognitive capacities- defined as the ability to solve written multiple-choice tasks (in the facilitator blind condition) on mathematics, translations of English into German, and geography, biology and other knowledge.”

Cardinal, D., Hanson, D., & Wakeham, J. (1996). An investigation of authorship in facilitated communication. *Mental Retardation* 34, 231-242.

The largest scale validation study to date. Forty-three individuals were asked to type words that they had seen but their facilitators had not seen. Seventy-four percent of the participants demonstrated that facilitation aided them in conveying words their facilitators had no way of knowing.

Crossley, R. (1997). *Speechless: Facilitating communication for people without voices*. New York: Dutton.

This book, written by the Australian educator widely recognized as one of the first to use facilitated communication, and certainly the first to prove the method's effectiveness through validation tests, includes a series of case studies, told autobiographically. Crossley describes her work with individuals who have different disabilities and who use a variety of augmentative and alternative communication systems (AAC), including in several instances facilitated communication. *Speechless* provides excellent documentation of the complexities of AAC and shows how the social context experienced by people who cannot speak has a dramatic impact on their opportunities to communicate in other ways.

Emerson A, Grayson A, Griffiths A. (2001). Can't or won't? Evidence relating to authorship in facilitated communication. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, 36, 98-103.

Most experimental evaluations of Facilitated Communication (FC) provide no evidence that this technique is valid. Important as they are, controlled test-based studies have characteristically not done justice to the complexity of the issues which surround FC. This paper summarises a long term evaluation project involving various forms of data collection. In this study too, controlled testing has shown very little evidence for the validity of the technique. In contrast, other sources of data, including records of naturally occurring message passing and intensive video analysis have provided evidence that the communication skills of some FC users have been enhanced. An overview of the project is presented, and discussed in relation to the blurring of findings (observations of behaviour) and inferences (judgements of communicative competence) in the extant literature.

Grayson, A., Emerson, A., Howard-Jones, P., & O'Neil, L. (2011). Hidden communicative competence: Case study evidence using eye-tracking and video analysis. *Autism*, Advance online publication. doi: 10.1177/1362361310393260.

A facilitated communication (FC) user with an autism spectrum disorder produced sophisticated texts by pointing, with physical support, to letters on a letterboard while their eyes were tracked and while their pointing movements were video recorded. This FC user has virtually no independent means of expression, and is held to have no literacy skills. The resulting data were subjected to a variety of analyses aimed at describing the relationship between the FC user's looking and pointing behaviours, in order to make inferences about the complex question of 'authorship'. The eye-tracking data present a challenge to traditional 'facilitator influence' accounts of authorship, and are consistent with the proposition that this FC user does indeed author the sophisticated texts that are attributed to him; he looks for longer at to-be-typed letters before typing them, and looks ahead to subsequent letters of words before the next letter of the word is typed.

Janzen-Wilde, M.L., Duchan, J.F., and Higginbotham, D.J. (1995). Successful use of facilitated communication with an oral child. *Journal of Speech and Hearing Research*, 38, 658-676.

“Evidence that he was authoring his own messages during his facilitated spelling was found in his idiosyncratic use of language and his ability to convey verifiable information that was unknown to the facilitator. The strongest evidence came later with his ability to type messages without physical support” (p. 658).

Marcus, E. and Shevin, M. (1997). Sorting it out under fire: Our journey. In D. Biklen and D. Cardinal (Eds.) *Contested words, contested science: Unraveling the facilitated communication controversy*. New York: Teachers College Press.

One of the authors (Marcus) has autism. In this article, Marcus replicates the Wheeler study cited below, and with modest modifications (e.g. numerous practice sessions, extended time to answer, etc.) demonstrates that he is the author of the words he types with facilitation. “The difference I felt from doing this task a year earlier was my clearest indication of how I had progressed during the previous year. The first time I tried, my nervousness limited me to nothing that was real. By my second trial, (there had been many practice sessions in between) I had gained the confidence I needed to write real thoughts, not just letting my fingers type without engaging my thinking. Please understand: facilitated communication is how I got from „point a” to „point b.” Readiness for independence starts from deep confidence, not a „sink-or-swim” mentality” (pp. 130-132).

Niemi, J. & Karna-Lin, E. (2002). Grammar and lexicon in facilitated communication: A linguistic authorship analysis of a Finnish case. *Mental Retardation*, 40, 347-357.

“In the data analysis, as explicit criteria for (the subject’s) idiosyncrasies, we used patterns typical of children acquiring Finnish as their first language and those found in normal slips of the tongue, acquired aphasia, and specific language impairment. Based on the analysis (i.e., the idiosyncrasy and agrammaticality of word-forms and sentences), we strongly suggest that his output can hardly be a product of any other speaker of Finnish, including that of his facilitators” (p. 347).

Olney, M. (1995). *A controlled evaluation of facilitated communication*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York. (Also available from University Microfilms, Ann Arbor Michigan).

A controlled, quantitative study in which adult users of facilitation were asked to play sophisticated computer games when their facilitators could not see the computer screen. Five of nine participants succeeded in doing so and in responding correctly to a majority of questions or activities, validating their communicative competence at statistically significant levels. See also the video documentary on this study, entitled *Under Controlled Conditions*, described at the website: <http://soeweb.syr.edu/thefci>.

Sheehan, C. & Matuoizzi, R. (1996) Validation of facilitated communication. *Mental Retardation*, 34, 94-107.

"Three individuals (8,10, and 24 years old with diagnoses of autism and mental retardation) participated in a message passing format to determine whether they could disclose information

previously unknown to their facilitators. Results showed valid facilitated communication from each participant. The facilitated speakers participated in 14 sessions, each lasting approximately 1 to 1.5 hours. A wide range of information was collected, coded, and analyzed for validity, consistency, language difficulties, behavioral compliance, and style of facilitation. Out of 720 communicative interactions, participants disclosed 77 incidents of unknown information. Each participant revealed unique behaviors and styles of responding, and all were able to demonstrate genuinely independent communication through disclosure of specific information previously unknown to a facilitator, although much inconsistency was noted. Results suggest that a phenomenon as complex as facilitated communication eludes a cursory exploration" (p. 94).

Tuzzi, A. (2009). Grammar and lexicon in individuals with autism: a quantitative analysis of a large Italian corpus. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 47, 373-385.

“Statistical and linguistic procedures were implemented to analyze a large corpus of texts written by 37 individuals with autism and 92 facilitators (without disabilities), producing written conversations by means of PCs. Such texts were compared and contrasted to identify the specific traits of the lexis of the group of individuals with autism and assess to what extent it differed from the lexis of the facilitators. [...] The results support the existence of lexis and distributional patterns of grammatical categories that are characteristic of the written production of individuals with autism and that are different from those of facilitators.” (p. 373)

Weiss, M.J.S., Wagner, S., & Bauman, M. (1996). A case of validated facilitated communication. *Mental Retardation*, 34, 220-230.

An article reporting on a controlled investigation of authorship using message passing. The study is especially important because it involves elaborate content for the message passing. "The case of a 13 year old boy with autism, severe mental retardation, and a seizure disorder who was able to demonstrate valid facilitated communication was described. In three independent trials, short stories were presented to him, followed by validation test procedures with an uninformed facilitator providing physical support to the subject's arm. In Trials 1 and 3, several specific answers were provided that clearly indicated that the young man, not the uninformed facilitator, was the source of the information. Moreover, some responses seemed to imply that the subject was employing simple inferential and abstract reasoning. This case study adds to the small, but growing number of demonstrations that facilitated communication can sometimes be a valid method for at least some individuals with developmental disabilities" (p. 220).