

FACILITATED COMMUNICATION

CHARACTERISTICS OVERVIEW CHART

Verbal Skills	Grade Levels	Cognitive Level	Areas Addressed
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Nonverbal <input type="checkbox"/> Mixed <input type="checkbox"/> Verbal	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PK <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Elementary <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Middle/High	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Classic <input type="checkbox"/> High Functioning	<input type="checkbox"/> (Pre)Academic/Cognitive/Academic <input type="checkbox"/> Adaptive Behavior/Daily Living <input type="checkbox"/> Behavior <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Communication/Speech <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Emotional

BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Facilitated communication (FC) is a controversial technique in which a facilitator provides physical, communication, and emotional support to an individual with a communication disorder (communicator). The facilitator attempts to assist the communicator by pointing to pictures, objects, printed letters, and words, or by using a keyboard.

Overall, quantitative research does *not* support the use of facilitated communication (Mostert, 2001). Further, the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, the American Psychological Association, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Association on Mental Retardation have issued statements about this technique, indicating that it is not an evidence-based practice and that programming or placement decisions should not be made on the basis of information gained from facilitated communication.

STEPS

Facilitated communication requires that facilitators provide varying levels of physical, communication, and emotional support to communicators. Physical support, in the form of backward pressure and resistance, is not intended to guide the communicator’s movements but to assist him in planning and executing movements. Physical support has been cited as essential to overcome hand function and motor planning and thus enable communicators to access their

communication systems. Support ranges from helping the communicator isolate an index finger, to touch at the wrist, elbow, and shoulder.

At times facilitator support may take the form of facilitators phrasing or rephrasing questions to lead to clarification. The need for predictability in language decreases as language use increases and conversations include more open-ended questions. Ultimately, the goal is independent communication in which communication proceeds without physical support from the facilitator (see also Rapid Prompting).

SUMMARY

Disagreements about the usefulness of facilitated communication relate directly to how success is defined. Entering into this debate is also the question of authorship. Few would disagree that independent pointing or typing validates authorship. However, progress toward independence is viewed by some as an indicator of success. Authorship remains an issue both among persons who do and those who do not pass formal validation tests. Validation of authorship in one situation does not automatically verify communicator authorship of every message that follows. Similarly, a failure to validate in one situation does not preclude the ability to author messages in other situations.

Experimental and qualitative research offers different perspectives on facilitated communication, especially with regard to validation. Not surprisingly, results of quantitative and qualitative investigations have consistently contradicted one another and, in the process, have confused the public and professionals looking for clear direction (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 1994). However, overall research does not support the use of facilitated communication.

RESEARCH TABLE

Number of Studies	Ages (year)	Sample Size	Area(s) Addressed	Outcome
29*	5- adult	152	Validity, reliability	Largely -

*Note: This includes an integrated review of the literature by Mostert (2001).

STUDIES CITED IN RESEARCH TABLE

1. Mostert, M. (2001). Facilitated communication since 1995: A review of published studies. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 31(3), 287-313.
This research review did not support the use of facilitated communication. As a result, Mostert called for stronger theoretical backing for facilitation communication techniques.

REFERENCES

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (1994). *Facilitated communication* [Technical Report]. Available from www.asha.org/policy

Mostert, M. (2001). Facilitated communication since 1995: A review of published studies. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 31(3), 287-313.

RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (1995). *Facilitated communication* [Position Statement]. Available from <http://www.asha.org/docs/html/PS1995-00089.html>
This link on the ASHA website provides links to multiple documents related to facilitated communication.