Introduction to Facilitated Communication

Pascal Cheng
Harvey Lavoy
Tracy Thresher

Autism Summer Institute, Concord, NH
August, 2012

What is facilitated communication?

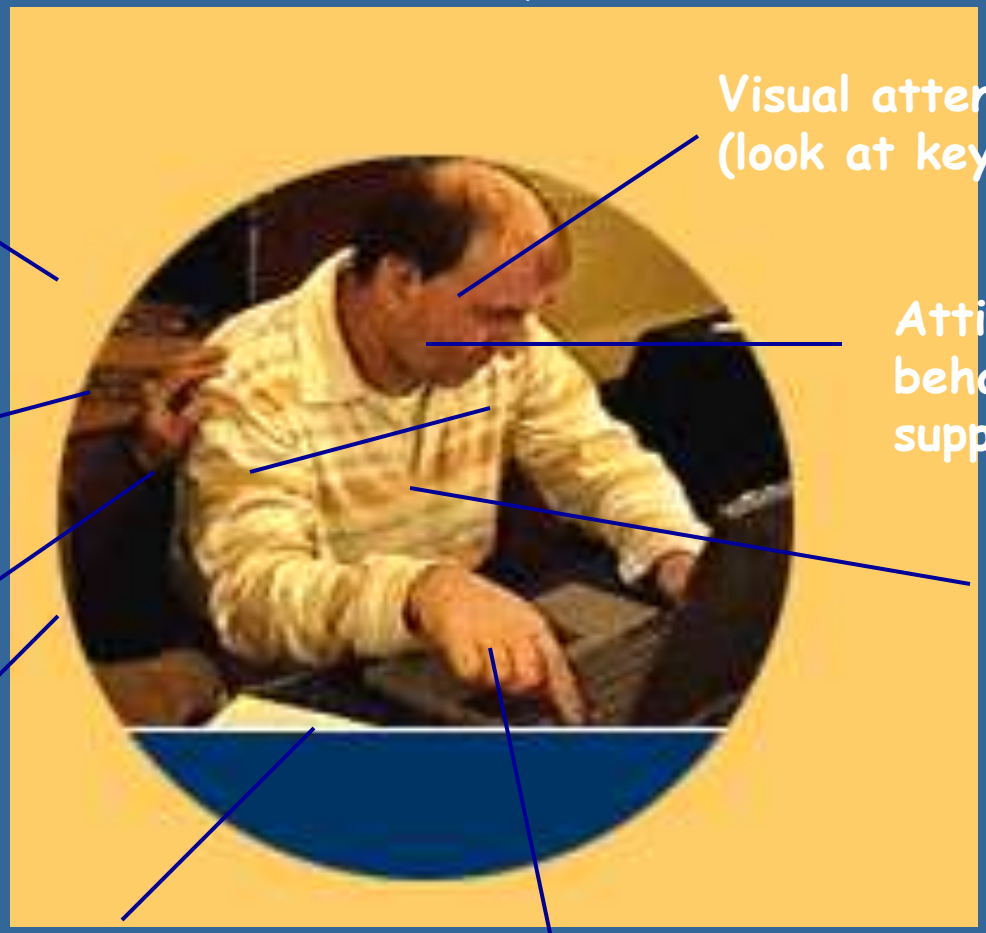
Strongest therapy for people with no means of expression is sensational, controversial, revolutionary, technically subtle FC. It involves understanding movement lapses of people and providing physical support to help overcome them. Plastic nature of users of FC requires topnotch weaning of support towards ultimate goal of independence.



Larry Bissonnette

Elements of Facilitated Communication Training

Adapted from Cardinal 2006



Emotional Support

Visual attention (look at keyboard)

Attitudinal and behavioral supports

Physical Support

Ergonomics

Communication support

Facilitator skill and training

Structured Activities

Pointing skills of FC user

The importance of trained facilitators for FC user skill development – structured facilitator training process

- Background info on FC
- Simulated practice activities
- Modeling by experienced facilitator
- Initial practice with supervision from experienced facilitator
- Regular practice with FC user and ongoing supervision from experienced facilitator

Guiding principles for the use of FC – Attitude

- Access to all forms of AAC including FC is a basic civil right.
- **Presumption of competence** is the starting point for supporting people who have difficulty with communication.

Presumption of Competence

It is especially important that difficulties with communication not be taken as evidence of intellectual competence. Although a person may be unable to demonstrate what she or he thinks and feels, or may have great difficulty being understood, she or he should not be further handicapped by the attitudes of others.

Facilitated Communication Training Standards (2000)

The Right to Communicate

Every person, regardless of the severity of his/her disabilities has the right and the ability to communicate with others, express everyday preferences, and exercise at least some control over his or her daily life. Each individual, therefore, should be given the chance, training, technology, respect and encouragement to do so.

Rosemary Crossley, Empowering Communication Aid Users, 1999

Larry Bissonnette

Fastening labels on people is like leasing cars with the destinations determined beforehand.



Anne McDonald, Annie's Coming Out, 1980



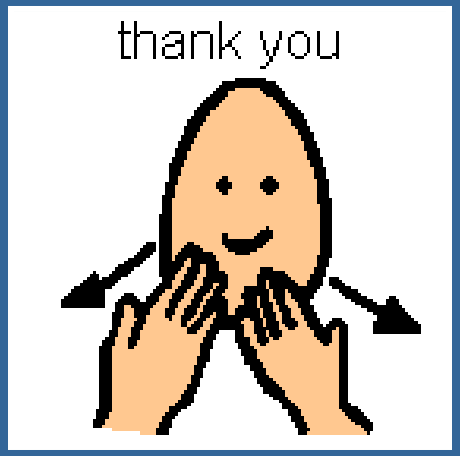
Unless someone makes a jump by going outside the handicapped person's previous stage of communication, there is no way the speechless person can do so. Failure is no crime. Failure to give someone the benefit of the doubt is.

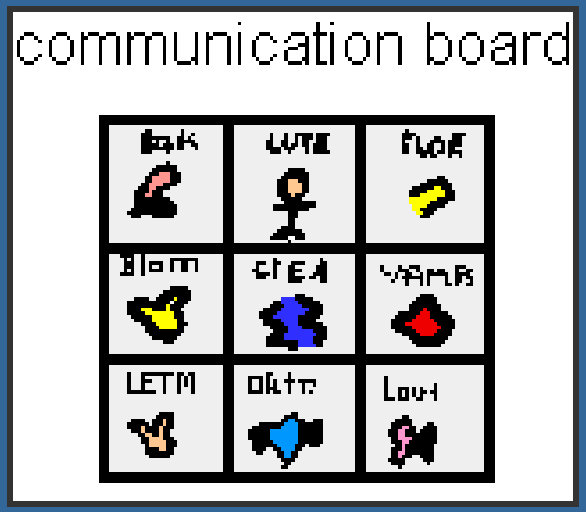
John on perceptions

- …Back when I was younger being autistic meant you were mentally retarded but it is different now because I have a way to mean more what is inside my head. Some times I still am seen like that because I either act like the wild autistic boy who cant control himself or am stuck on my repetitive *you* autistic behavior habits…

Understanding Augmentative/alternative communication and FC

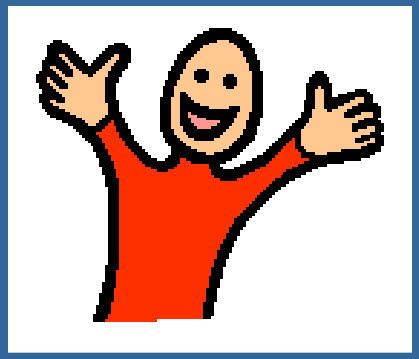
Sign language

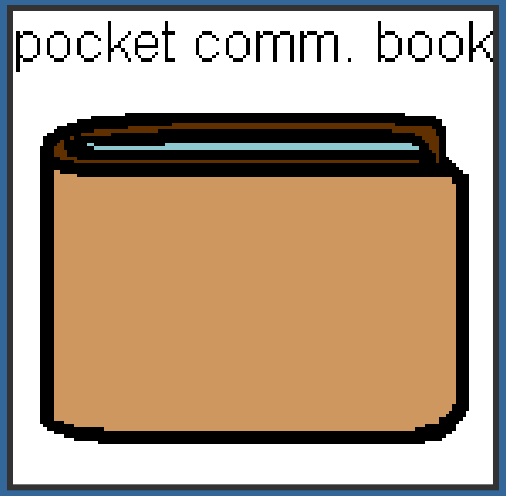


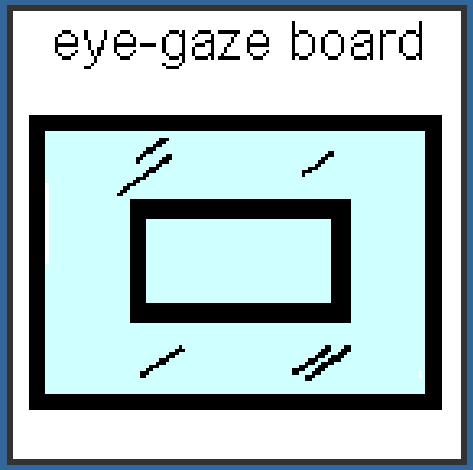




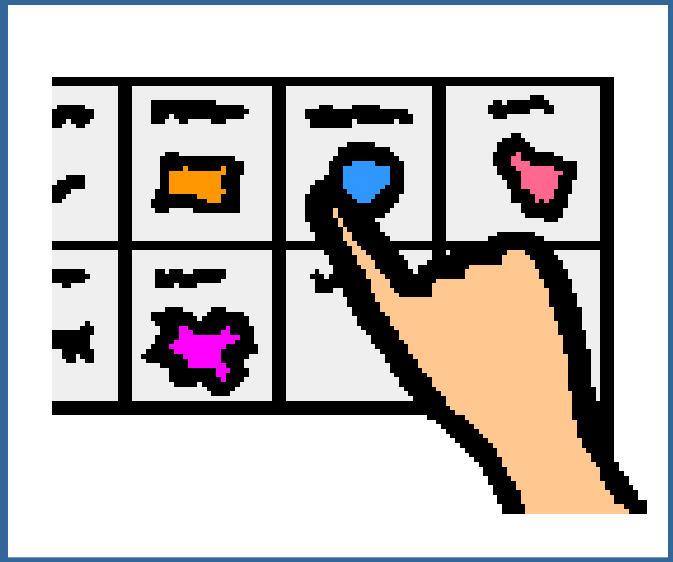
Gestures/Body action







Pointing skills are often required to access communication aids and devices. Selecting through touching, pointing, etc. pictures, symbols, words and letters to communicate a message.



Literacy and Communication

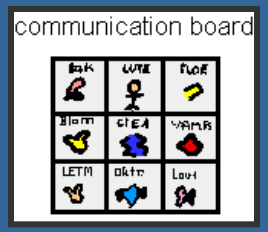
"Letters and Words Make a Life, Not McDonald's Hamburgers and Fries"

Larry Bissonnette

What is Facilitated Communication?

Facilitated Communication, or facilitated communication ***training*** is a form of augmentative alternative communication (AAC) in which people are provided with ***physical support*** to help develop effective pointing skills for communication using pictures, symbols, letters and words.







In facilitated communication, a person will need physical support, i.e. facilitation to point to selections on a communication board or device.

FC is helpful for those who cannot speak or whose speech is highly limited (e.g. echoed from others or limited to one or a few word utterances) and for who people who cannot point independently or reliably because of specific neuromotor difficulties.

Total Communication Approach:

Facilitated communication should always be offered as part of a full system of strategies which might include sign language, simple gestures and facial expressions, single words and phrases, and independent pointing.

Facilitated Communication Training Standards, 2000

Candidacy for FC

The assessment process for FC involves looking to see whether a person has physical/movement problems which affect their ability to point independently or reliably and whether physical support can help a person overcome those problems.

Examples of motor impairment affecting communication

Perhaps the child who has difficulty executing manual signs correctly or producing them without verbal prompts has underlying motor coordination and motor planning deficits. Perhaps the adolescent who repetitively activates the same symbols on her SGD and bites her hand when she is unable to stop doing so has an underlying problem with motor control. Perhaps we need to take the motor skills of individuals with ASD into account when planning AAC interventions, just as we do with individuals with more obvious motor challenges.

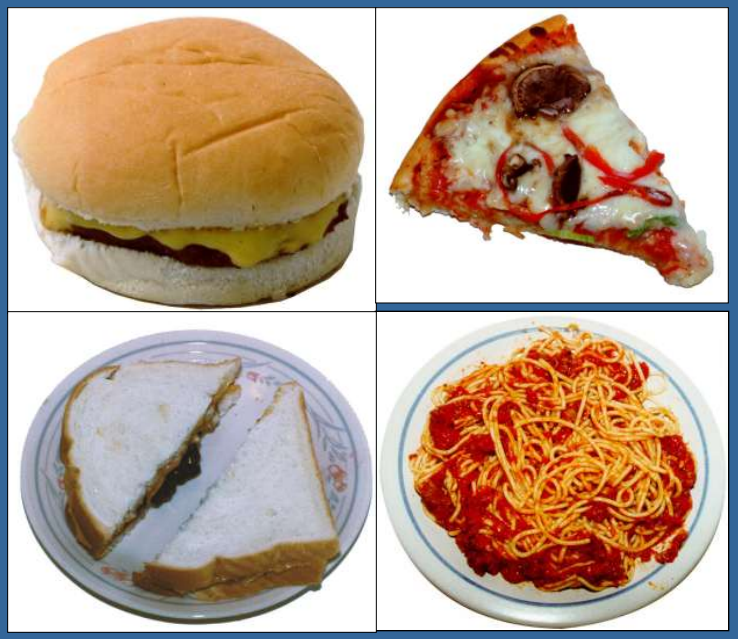
Mirenda, "A Backdoor Approach to Autism and AAC", *Augmentative and Alternative Communication, Sept. 2008, p. 227*



Sue Rubin

"Movement issues for me are a connection difficulty. I hear you ask me to complete a task, but my legs stay put. Through the use of FC I have been better able to get my body to engage in a task. Typing requires thinking and focus. My body has been trained to focus on movement when asked to do something or asked to respond. "

Movement is essential to communication. I am unable to speak because of apraxia, a movement disorder. I can type because the movement of one finger going up and down is much easier than speaking or sign language. Adding a series of movements as in sign language would be dreadfully frustrating for me. Even simple movements are trying at times. "

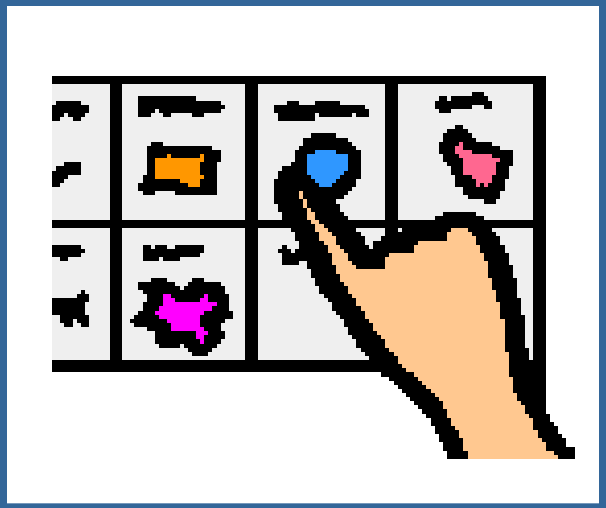


Q W E R T Y U I O P delete

A S D F G H J K L

Z X C V B N M , .

space



Observe the person doing a variety of activities involving pointing. Look for physical problems that might be affecting pointing.

Examples of physical/movement problems

- Difficulty isolating an index finger
- Pointing without looking
- Pointing too quickly
- Difficulty with extending arm/hand
- Initiating movement to point
- Difficulty with new motor tasks, i.e. typing novel communication
- Hitting the same selection or series of selections, e.g. automatic words and phrases, repetitively

Tracy Thresher describing his movement challenges:



My impulse control problems, my way of going too hard at the letters and my problems with perseveration, are things I need help from my facilitators…









Point to the picture of "pizza".

Can you point to the word, "milk"

Milk

Juice

Tea

Soda

Which drink comes from a cow?

Q W E R T Y U I O P

delete

A S D F G H J K L

Z X C V B N M ,

.

space

Independent typing is not always reliable:

LARRYFEELBETTERHAPPY

GOINGHOMEPINESTWINOOSKIVT

SITDOWNCHAIRTVONSUPPER

CORNSTACKPOTATOSION

PLAINSPEESICETEESPIE

BANANASMILKBEER

PRINT



Determine physical support strategies that will help to remedy the problems and *improve* the person's pointing skills

Tracy – Describing the physical support he needs:

The facilitator must slow me down and pull my arm back to help me start again so that I can point to the correct letter I am going for. I would not be able to type the words I really want without the firm resistance of the facilitator.

Role of the facilitator

In FCT, a partner (facilitator) helps the communication aid user overcome physical problems and develop effective pointing skills.

Rosemary Crossley

Physical Support

- Provides physical support *in response* to specific hand function/movement issues
  - For example, slowing down a person who is pointing too fast or molding a person's fingers back from their index finger
  - For low muscle tone/strength, pulling a person's hand back above their board or device so that that they can reach selections



As the student's skills and confidence increase the amount of facilitation is reduced. The ultimate goal is for students to be able to use the communication aid(s) of their choice independently.

Rosemary Crossley

Photos – Institute on Communication and Inclusion









Levels of support → Independence

Pointing and related skills that can be improved through the use of FC

- Index finger isolation and extension
- Visual focus
- Accuracy of pointing
- Upright seating position
- Development of deliberate rhythm
- Maintaining slow, even movement
- Decreasing impulsive or automatic movement
- Initiating movement
- Organization of movements – arm/hand positioning
- Attention to task

Physical Support Strategies

- Pulls hand back from the communication device to a neutral position, ie. not side to side
- Provides backwards resistance only, does not move co-actively with the person

Getting the physical support right

- "it pressures swith y your hand on my haned to just slow me down nott guide my hand. findinfg with the right mofvemdent rightt lettsers i cant do on my o2wn like w it looks like i dont know 5the lett3der but attimpting the lwett4er is hard. not timing my pull bac,k and pressure right"

John on impulse control

- it is my impulsive ness totally forcing my help hand help is good on my hot hoanf hand to l;et me thuink it out cleerly.

Physical Support

- Provides minimal level support
- Creates opportunities for pointing with less physical support
- NO GUIDING - waits for the person to initiate the movement

Physical Support

- Positions the communication device at an accessible angle and height for the person









Physical Support

- Regularly monitors whether the person is looking at the communication device

- Monitors pace and rhythm of person's pointing movement and adjusts physical support to accommodate changes:

Physical Support

- uses more backwards pressure to slow the person down if they begin pointing too rapidly
- pulls the person's hand back and brings to a pause to interrupt the pattern of hitting the same selection over and over (perseveration)

Communication Support

- Provides skill reminders to the person about their movement, e.g. "Slow down", "Reach more for the letters"

- Provides prompts and cues to help a person get started, maintain their focus or continue an interaction, e.g. "What's the next letter?", "Keep going", "Look at what you are doing"

Communication Support

- Provides feedback on what pictures, words, letters a person has pointed to, e.g."G-O-space-N-O-W, go now"
- Provides feedback on content of messages and asks clarifying questions, "So you want to go now?" "Yes", "Tell me where you want to go"

Emotional Support

- Conveys high expectations and belief in the person's competence, "I know you can do this"
- Maintains a calm and respectful attitude
- Offers encouragement and positive feedback to build confidence

What kind of training activities are used when getting started with facilitated communication?

Getting Started - Set Work

Set work is any activity which allows the FC speaker to point to an answer that is already known to the FC listener.

The Language Ladder

(adapted from Rosemary Crossley)

- Conversation
- Self Expression
- Open ended Questions
- Less Predictable
- Predictable work



Setwork activities enable both the FC listener and the FC speaker to build confidence in their ability to facilitate; to "get a feel" for the motion that is most successful for the FC speaker and to insure a no-fail starting point.

(Shubert, FC Resource Guide)

Can you point to the word, "milk"

Milk

Juice

Tea

Soda

Which drink comes from a cow?

Fill in the blank/ predictable:

A large astronomical body that revolves around the sun is called a _____ (planet).

Fill in the blank/open:

One of the planets in our solar system is _____.

Multiple choice/classical:

"Do you want strawberry, chocolate or vanilla ice cream?"

Multiple choice/limited:

"What is your favorite flavor of ice cream?"



Open Questions/Shared Knowledge: *"Tell me what is happening in the picture."*



The goal of participation in everyday conversation

Guiding principles for the use of FC

- Specific guidelines and standards are needed to support the use of FC.
- Evaluation of a person's progress with FC can be done through observation and documentation.

Documenting progress and success

- Evaluation of a person's progress with FC can be done through observation and documentation of the content of their communication and their actual pointing and typing skills over time. This can be part of a **communication portfolio.**

Portfolio Approach to Documentation for FC

- Structured way of collecting information over time on an individual's progress with FC focusing specifically on authorship, and independence
- FC user is directly involved in the portfolio documentation process

Portfolio Approach

- Is best done when there are adequate supports in place for FC for an individual, e.g. multiple, trained facilitators; regular opportunities to use FC

- Methods of collecting info can include the use of forms, logs, transcripts and videotapes

What is documented?

- Instances where the person has done successful message passing, i.e., conveying information unknown to the facilitator
- Demonstrations of independent pointing and typing

What is documented?

- Patterns of unique typographical errors and creative/phonetic spellings; unusual syntax and expressions
- Similarity of communication style across facilitators
- Correlation between speech and typing