

Facilitated Communication: Illuminating or Eliminating Voices?

For my Capstone project, I have chosen to study the critiques around Facilitated Communication (FC) in order to explore and promote more positive and inclusive Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC) practices that center the voices and experiences of nonverbal individuals. Facilitated Communication is a practice that has historically been used in general education classrooms and by Speech-Language Pathologists where a nonverbal individual is provided with a facilitator and a speech board. The facilitator is usually an able-bodied individual who guides the nonverbal individual's arm and helps them type messages via the speech board. However, FC's success as a form of AAC has not been linked to any empirical evidence and there have been reports of abuse and speaking *for* the individual with disability. I am passionate about unveiling the main paradox I have identified within FC: While some argue that Facilitated Communication illuminates the voice of those with various disabilities, I realize that it may ultimately have the potential to *eliminate* the true voice of an individual with a disability. Centrally, FC inherently posits that spoken language is superior to non-verbal forms of communication, and that only verbal communicators are acceptable in general education settings. This view deeply invalidates the experience of many nonverbal individuals and greatly oppresses them. My goal is to look at and find ways to promote and intertwine healthier alternatives to Facilitated Communication in educational settings. I am personally passionate about dismantling this damaging approach because next year, I will be attending San Diego State University for my Masters in Speech-Language Pathology, with an emphasis in working with individuals with disabilities. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that I carry with me the disability justice and disability studies principles. Furthermore, I want to ensure that the support I provide as a clinician is centered around individuality, cultural humility,

and respect for *all* individuals. While I am excited to pursue this passion for speech and language, I recognize that this research is crucial to my growth as an advocate and in creating spaces of therapy that do not attempt to fix or assume, but rather employ empathy. Ultimately, I believe that this research has the potential to raise the voices of those most affected by FC while reinforcing the need for systemic change in the area of communication in general education classrooms.