

Even Though I Can't Talk I Still Have Something to Say

By Carly O'Connell

Dedicated To Mom, Dad, Like, Tess, and P.D.

Once upon a time, there was a girl who could not talk. Everyone thought she was playing dumb or being stupid. Really she was under an evil curse so her muscles would not work.

She tried and tried to let everyone know she was trapped inside her body with no way to plan her movement. Planning worked sometimes, but not enough to be able to say the word they would understand.

She learned to make them know what she wanted to eat, and which movies and books she liked, but they did not understand that she had so much more to tell them. Like how she could spell, read and think about complicated things. Like how she knew her colors and numbers in the first year of pre-school, but they made her practice them like she knew nothing until she was nine years old and started typing.

Like how little noises made her feel crazy. Like how people touching her hands felt like nothing at all because they did not pick the right way to hold them. Like how only Mom let her choose her favorite juice and only Dad let her play obstacle course games.

Like how nobody knew her favorite color was green and she hated wearing pink clothes every day to school. Like putting her in only life skills instead of real classes. Like how they all thought she could never go to college when she knew more than most kids her age.

Like playing baby leapfrog games when she was seven years old. Like the way they ignored her unless people were really special. Only they knew she paid attention.

Like how nobody believed in the typing until Miss Small did a presentation and surprised everyone. Like the way they all thought they knew how to teach her life skills when she could not control her muscles, so how could she keep up with other kids cutting crafts by themselves? Good teachers open their minds and hearts to let every student be heard, no matter how they manage to communicate.

INFORMATION ABOUT FACILITATED COMMUNICATION

Facilitated communication (FC) is a type of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) that has been an effective means of expression for some individuals with labels of autism and other developmental disabilities. FC learners communicate by typing on a keyboard or pointing at letters, images, or other symbols to represent messages. A combination of physical and emotional support is provided for the individual who has difficulties with speech and with intentional pointing (i.e., unassisted typing). Physical support consists of supporting the arm of the individual who is communicating with FC. The intensity of this support is faded as the individual becomes more successful with the physical process of typing. The best relationship between facilitator and communicator is built over time. Each facilitator-communicator relationship is different, as are the relationships between various communication partners of individuals who have traditional speech capabilities. FC has been a controversial process that is not easily supported by positivist research. The annotated bibliography below provides more information.

Resources

1. Classic article by Douglas Biklen, et al. on the process of introducing Facilitated Communication (FC) to 22 autistic students age 3-21 years, who did not speak, or spoke only with echolalic phrases.

Biklen, D., Morton, M. W., Shaswati, N. S., Duncan, J., Gold, D., Hardardottir, M., Karna, E., O'Connor, S., & Rao, S. (1991). "I AM NOT AUTISTIC ON THE TYPEWRITER." (*"I'm not autistic on the typewriter."*) *Disability, Handicap & Society*, 6(3), 161-180.

2. Website for the Syracuse University Facilitated Communication Institute, committed to training, research and dissemination of information related to the use of Facilitated Communication.

http://suedweb.syr.edu/centers_institutes/inclusion_institute/facilitated_communications/default.aspx

3. Chandima Rajapatirana uses facilitated communication to speak with his mother, Anoja, who is also one of his facilitators.

<http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1192775,00.html>

4. American Psychological Association Resolution on Facilitated Communication

<http://www.apa.org/divisions/div33/fcpolicy.html>