

Abstract of Action Research Project in Facilitated Communication Training

Background: Facilitated Communication Training (FCT) is a controversial approach to supporting people with severe communication difficulties. It is one method of supporting Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC). It has the potential for enabling people with severe language impairments to access communication aids. The local education authority had experience of enabling a non-verbal young person with cerebral palsy who uses FCT to access mainstream education and were open to exploring whether other young people could benefit from this support.

Aims: To explore ways of introducing FCT within the local authority in order to enhance the communication of young people who had been identified as not having had access to the means of reaching their communication potential.

Method: An action research approach resulted in the implementation of a pilot project. AAC/FCT was introduced to a group of seven pupils and the adults who support them through a training and support programme. A case study methodology was used to analyse the outcomes for pupils and adults.

Results: Action research was found to support the introduction of FCT. Some pupils showed significant gains through access to AAC/FCT. The majority of adults reported changes in their knowledge, use and attitudes towards AAC/FCT. Many attributed this to an increased belief in pupils' potential.

Conclusions: Action research is an effective process in supporting change. There is a theoretical basis for explaining why FCT supports some pupils. The discourse used to describe FCT could be further supported by using theories that take account of context (mediated learning and activity theory) and could contribute to changing the negative historical and socio-cultural discourse associated with FCT. An effective training and ongoing support programme lead to changes in adults' practice.