

**SPOTTED**

# Fake facilitation; third strike; Pokémon passion

BY ROBIN LLOYD

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## Fake facilitation

A **discredited autism ‘therapy’ persists** in part because the institute that pioneered the method still promotes it, according to an article in *The Atlantic* on Wednesday.

In so-called ‘facilitated communication,’ a trained adult, or ‘facilitator,’ applies pressure to a child’s hand or arm to help the child type out her thoughts.

But the messages tend to reflect the imagination or hopes of the facilitator instead, critics contend — and a large body of research supports their skepticism.

In fact, the American Psychological Association and other professional societies stated in the 1990s that there is no scientific evidence that the method reliably relays what a person with autism is thinking.

Yet the Institute on Communication and Inclusion at Syracuse University, where facilitated communication was invented more than two decades ago, continues to spread the word about the method and provide information about how to perform it.

### SOURCES:

**The Atlantic** / 20 Jul 2016

The battle over a controversial method for autism communication

<http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/07/a-controversial-method-for-autism-communication/491810/>

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## Third strike

An autism researcher has **retracted a paper** on signaling in a molecular pathway called WNT, published in 2012 in the *Journal of Neuroinflammation*.

The retraction marks the third for **Xiaohong Li** at the **Institute for Basic Research in Developmental Disabilities** (IBR) in New York. All of the papers retracted were co-authored by **W. Ted Brown**, the institute's director. The first **two retractions came in 2013**, according to a post published Wednesday on Retraction Watch.

Investigators found problems with figures that “underpin the conclusions of the study,” the retraction note states. Reviewers concluded that the paper was not fabricated, **Carl Dobkin**, chair of the Research Integrity Committee at IBR, told Retraction Watch. Laboratory mismanagement and “inadequate supervision of junior investigators” might have led to the problems, he said.

### SOURCES:

**Retraction Watch** / 20 Jul 2016

Institute director loses third paper following investigation

<http://retractionwatch.com/2016/07/20/institute-director-loses-third-paper-following-investigation/>

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## Citation cheaters

More nefarious methods also corrode science these days. Scientists may engage in a number of backhanded tactics that artificially inflate the importance of their work, according to an essay published last week in *Nature*.

Authors may supply journal editors with a fake email address for a suggested reviewer. If editors take the bait, they solicit a review that the authors themselves write. In other cases, confederates may supply positive reviews solicited via a fake email address. Authors return the favor with citations to the confederate's work.

This **growing category of academic misconduct** erodes research credibility. Scientists have been forced to retract at least 300 papers as a result of these underhanded tactics.

The science within these papers is probably valid, but the methods used to elevate their value are not, writes **Mario Biagioli**, professor of law and science and technology studies at the University of California, Davis.

### SOURCES:

**Nature** / 12 Jul 2016

Watch out for cheats in citation game

<http://www.nature.com/news/watch-out-for-cheats-in-citation-game-1.20246>

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## Antipsychotics revisited

Doctors may treat irritability associated with autism with any of several antipsychotic drugs. Four of them lead to weight gain.

But the effects of these four on weight are **not at all identical**, according to results published 7 July in the *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychopharmacology*. In fact, the study found no evidence of weight gain with one of the meds: quetiapine (Seroquel).

The researchers analyzed the medical charts of 202 children and young adults who visited either of two psychiatry clinics between 2004 and 2014.

Participants who took olanzapine (Zyprexa) for up to four years put on the most weight, but those who took aripiprazole (Abilify) or **risperidone (Risperdal)** also put on pounds. Abilify and Risperdal are the only drugs approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for treatment of autism-related issues.

### SOURCES:

**Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychopharmacology** / 07 Jul 2016

Weight gain effects of second-generation antipsychotic treatment in autism spectrum disorder

<http://online.liebertpub.com/doi/abs/10.1089/cap.2016.0049>

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## Pokémon passion

The Pokémon Go frenzy has made its way to the autism community. Some say it's a boon.

The popular mobile-phone game has **improved the social skills** of a 6-year-old boy with autism, according to a story published Tuesday on TODAY.com.

Ralphie Koppelman usually avoids eye contact with strangers, panics when routines change and struggles to hold a conversation. But playing Pokémon Go, which involves exploring outdoor places in search of virtual Pokémon characters, made him smile, laugh and ask to go to the playground at new times. One time, he even gave a fellow Pokémon player on the street a 'high-five.'

“Seeing that acceptance was great,” his mother Lenore Koppelman told TODAY.

For similar reasons, a principal at a school for children with autism in Australia **encourages his pupils** to play the game in the classroom.

“For many of the children I teach it’s hard to engage in social activities — even going down to the shops can be socially overwhelming,” **Craig Smith** told *The Independent*. “But what we’re seeing with the Pokémon craze is the same students are making conversation and engaging in social activities through the game.”

**SOURCES:**

**TODAY** / 19 Jul 2016

How Pokemon Go sparked ‘miracle’ transformation in boy with autism

<http://www.today.com/parents/how-pokemon-go-sparked-miracle-transformation-boy-autism-t100928>

**The Independent** / 19 Jul 2016

Pokémon Go used in classrooms to help autistic children

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/pok-mon-go-classroom-help-autistic-children-australia-craig-smith-a7144946.html>

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## Job moves

**Jason Yi**, currently a postdoctoral research fellow with **Mark Zylka** at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, will join the Department of Neuroscience faculty at Washington University in St. Louis.

The Royal Society has named **Amina Abubakar**, of **Kenya Medical Research Institute**, the winner of its **Pfizer Award 2016**, for her research on neurodevelopmental assessments in Africa.

Making a career change? Send your news to [jobmoves@spectrumnews.org](mailto:jobmoves@spectrumnews.org).

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