

Public Letter to ASHA on Spelling Methodologies to support Minimally Speaking People

November 25, 2025

Dear ASHA Board and Corporate Partners,

We are a collective of scientists and practitioners who are working to understand apparent savantism and authorship in nonspeaking autistic people. We are performing this research in a scientifically rigorous and open-minded way, so we can truly characterize the capacities of these individuals. This letter is an invitation to join us in an inclusive approach. Per this approach, we are including nonspeaking and minimally speaking people in our research as informed participants and co-researchers as we conduct rigorous trials examining authorship. Our preliminary results are compelling and informative, and the research teams signing this letter hope to present our authorship investigations at ASHA 2026. Until then, the signees of this letter wish to communicate some facts about the state of the field, and some concerns about ASHA's position with respect to spelling methods.

Based on the decades of work represented in our community, we have observed that many minimally speaking people have an apraxia [diagnosis](#) and sensorimotor processing differences. Apraxia, which disrupts the planning and execution of purposeful movement, often prevents nonspeaking individuals from showing how much they truly comprehend because [all intelligence testing is motor based](#). Speech is a motor ability, while language is a cognitive ability. As neurologists know, individuals with lesions localized to the speech area can almost always still understand speech, ideas, thoughts, and [have language comprehension intact](#). In our interactions with schools, parents, and communities, we are concerned that minimally speaking individuals are [being underestimated](#) – for instance, not being given the same consideration as stroke patients with apraxia. We hope to encourage a new wave of research in collaboration with ASHA that takes into account motor disabilities as differentiated from intellectual disabilities.

At the time of ASHA's foundation in 1925, the societal assumption was that hard-of-hearing people were not intelligent – not that they simply couldn't hear. Much work went into proving the competence of deaf people, including some of foundational work by ASHA, and we hope to continue this work as we explore and begin to understand the cognitive competence we see among nonspeakers and minimally speaking people.

In addition, we think it is important to inform you about some scientific mis-steps made in a recent seminar in your 2025 conference program. The seminar "[Minding Myths: Systematic Review of Rapid Prompting/Spellers Method and Critical Appraisal of Telepathy Tapes](#)" was presented on Friday Nov. 21 by Ralph Schlosser (Northeastern), Bronwyn Hemsley (U. Technology Sydney), Howard Shane (Harvard), Russell Lang (Texas State University), and

Katharine Beals (Autism Language Therapies). Those who were not able to attend can find the [published paper here](#), and the [slides for the presentation here](#).

The seminar's abstract alone, which would have been submitted for referee approval prior to the presentation, states that Rapid Prompting Method/Spellers Method/S2C (RPM/S2C) are both (1) pseudoscientific and (2) dangerous. These assertions – offered as the first sentence in the abstract without any evidence – clearly expose the bias of the authors. The authors don't present these statements as their hypothesis to be investigated, but as a priori facts that they then plan to prove with their review of the literature.

The talk arrived at the conclusion "All output in a facilitated encounter, whether legal, casual, technical, family related etc. etc. are the words of the facilitator." However, their literature review excludes all papers that could meaningfully address the question of authorship. We suspect the exclusions are too limiting for this fledgling field if no articles pass the requirements. The authors ignore, for instance, an [eye-tracking study in Nature](#) from the University of Virginia because it had been "criticized" by one of the presenters, and [innovative work on rigorous authenticity of message tests that take into account the interests of the nonspeakers](#) from Nottingham Trent University because it included qualitative and stylistic approaches along with the quantitative approaches. This literature review methodology runs counter to the pursuit and dissemination of open and honest scientific inquiry.

Further, there is an attempt here to harness stigma around the phenomenon of telepathy and other nonlocal capacities as a way to discredit communication via letterboard or keyboard. We have learned in our work that any attempt to allow stigma to do the heavy lifting of a scientific conclusion is self-defeating in that it avoids potential areas of discovery. The job of scientists interested in human perception, cognition, and behavior is to understand and characterize all the phenomena that people report, and not to assume that reported phenomena don't exist.

The authors also determined that no qualitative observations of language or stylistics would be used in their analysis, so they rejected any tests of authorship employing these methods. Yet in their slides they reference the same types of methods to prove other points (e.g., the Linguistic Evidence slide). We find it logically incoherent to ignore one type of evidence when it goes against a conclusion and to include it when it supports another conclusion.

Finally, when it came to providing evidence for their assertion that spelling methods cause harm, the authors highlighted malpractice in their presentation, making it appear that the majority of practitioners trained in spelling methods are causing harm. Meanwhile, malpractice and abuse occur in every field ([including](#) within ASHA-supported environments), and it is reasonable to assume such abuse is much less likely with training methods like RPM and S2C that are geared towards autonomy and developing independence. We can agree that people with disabilities are a vulnerable population and we all must work together to reinforce the importance of training and ethics.

We are concerned that this presentation is a signal from ASHA that you will continue to claim that spelling methods cause harm and thus discourage their use. We believe that every person with a speech, hearing, or language disability must have as many potential resources as possible, because each journey and the supports needed will be different. We believe, and we know ASHA was built on the foundation of the idea, that the least harmful assumption in the field of speech, language, and hearing disorders is to presume competence and move forward to serve a population that has been grossly underserved. This can encompass a broad spectrum of combined “evidence-based” methodologies tailored to an individual’s strengths and needs, including spelling-based communication methods (S2C/RPM/SPELLERS) that use partner support while building toward autonomy and independence.

Spelling methods currently provide communication support for what we believe to be thousands of minimally speaking people. Because ASHA discourages spelling methods, there is little research on the number of already-existing individuals who have used these methods for years and have now been mainstreamed into public education and have improved quality of life.

We hope that together we can revisit how to (1) rewrite policies to address the use of letter boards with all supports (including communication partners) and the ethical responsibility to presume competence and become professionally trained (2) establish and fund a breadth of research including rigorous peer-reviewed studies addressing authorship and savant abilities among minimally speaking people, and (3) encourage a more scientifically sound and open-minded approach to how we view the emerging research in this new field.

With deep gratitude for your interest in bringing hope to individuals with disabilities,

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