

Aphasia Insights!

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“To act, is to a certain extent to set forth or proclaim our will. Our actions publicly enlist us on one side or the other...”

...It is impossible to overestimate the energy which is given to the feelings and the will by taking a decided public stand (pg. 215).”

The Education of the Will; The Theory and Practice of Self-Culture (1914).

Jules Payot (1859-1939) was a leading French figure in lay education, pedagogy and philosophy.

Stroke Educator, Inc. is committed to educating the wider public about stroke and the 50 state “*Aim High for Aphasia!*” Aphasia Awareness Campaign.

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Enriched Therapy:
Publicly proclaiming our errors can be highly therapeutic.

By Tom Broussard, Ph.D.

I was speaking at a presentation last week, and afterwards, one person with aphasia came up to me and asked, “Do you still practice...doing speech therapy kinds of things? Or have you stopped “doing” the practice thing?”

I laughed and pointed at my watch and said, “Isn’t *this* therapy (looking at the crowd)? Isn’t this the same as everyday living? This is what I do every day...and, yes, I still call it *practice* and it is still my best therapy.”

A couple of years ago, I became astutely aware of mistakes I was making to an audience. I could tell that I was missing things; words I

couldn’t pronounce, long words that trailed off at the end, words I couldn’t grasp and had to find an easy word to keep the conversation moving.

It takes time to *notice* and attempt to *correct* an error while still in the process of *making* the error in the first



case. Less than a second is hardly noticed by the audience. A second or two are noted but accepted without a

thought. But more than that of silence are an indication that a person with aphasia is probably working very hard on the inside trying to get out of this jam.

Another part of this tableaux was that while I was trying not to drown (metaphorically speaking), *I* could tell that the *audience* could tell that I was, in fact, drowning. I could see it in their eyes.

At that point, I realized that unless I *tell* them that I am in the middle of this battle, they will shut their eyes to the problem and then we would *all* be embarrassed until it (mercifully) ends.

Then I had a great idea. Why don't I alert them (as soon as I recognize my errors in the making), and tell them *immediately* that I am in the middle of this melee. Then I ask them if *they* could *also* recognize the start of an error even before it has reached its crescendo.

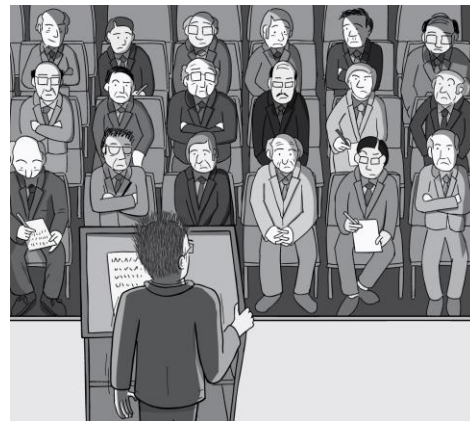
I began to realize that almost anything that is a problem for me, is a problem for others too. Of course, it really isn't a problem as much as it can be a social embarrassment of one kind or another.

I also recognized that by asking the audience to join the conversation allowed me the time to regroup and move forward with a new line of attack.

After doing that a few times, I realized that the encounters were also highly therapeutic (at least for me) and possibly for the audience too. With that realization, it allowed me to consider other options

while waiting for the clouds to dissipate and angry skies clear.

Our language is so dense with many detours, deviations and diversions, that almost any cut in the path could be either a problem or an opportunity in disguise.



I learned a lot about my problems by publicly asking my audience to tell me if they can see my errors on the fly.

I wanted to see (their reaction) from *their* perspective, about *my* perspective, about *their* understanding about *my* understanding of *theirs*. (If you can understand *that* sentence, then we have both learned a lot!)

In either case, I recommend we publicly display, explain and expose our errors (however small) as another

therapeutic tool in the ongoing enriched therapy toolkit and improve ours communication skills at any stage of recovery.

Signed:

The Johnny Appleseed of Aphasia Awareness.