

Aphasia Insights!

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“...he inherits the power of constructing a language by an unconscious activity of absorption (pg. 80).”

The Absorbent Mind (1949)

Maria Montessori (August 31, 1870-May 6, 1952) was an Italian physician and educator best known for the philosophy of education that bears her name, and her writing on scientific pedagogy.

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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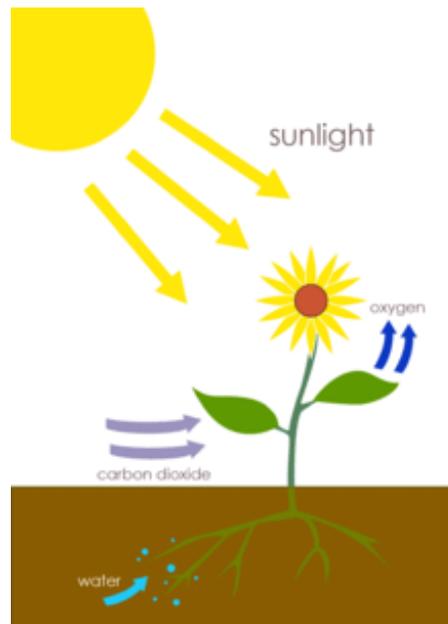
Aphasia Recovery: Plasticity is the Foundation of All Learning, Part I.

By Tom Broussard, Ph.D.

I had my stroke and aphasia in 2011. I lost my language and could not read, write or speak well. I lost my job and spent 11 months *thinking* my way through the problem. I got better but *how* did I get better? That was the issue and I have been studying it ever since.

I kept my calendar. I wrote a 500 page diary using graphs, charts and metaphorical drawings with text that made no sense. I recorded my voice trying to understand what I was trying to say. I took pictures of the world around me with words I couldn't read.

I didn't realize that those daily activities provided the grist for the communication mill and the process of reconstructing my language. It turned out that the activities *themselves* were the active ingredients of my emerging recovery.



The brain is changed by experience and is quite plastic and malleable. It learns using *experience-dependent* neuroplasticity and is essential to inducing growth

whether the brain is healthy or damaged by a stroke. *Action* is the key.

Although everyone knows that photosynthesis converts sunlight into green leaves, very few know much about their scientific cousin,

neuroplasticity that converts *thinking* and *doing* into neural (brain) matter.

The brain operates when presented with plasticity-induced activities that actually *feel* the experience of learning in action. The process of plasticity (and learning as a result) are drawn from a complex enriched environment that requires mental stimulation and physical activities.

Examples of the principles of neuroplasticity (use it or lose it, use it or improve it, repetition matters, intensity matters, and salience matters) outline the problem-solving environment of people with aphasia as well as healthy people with the same ability to create new dendrites and synapses as a result of the *thinking* and *doing* activities.

I got better using the same activities, with the same properties, inducing plasticity with the same capacity to learn as before. But I got better without knowing that what I was

doing was the *reason* I got better. I think that ignorance really is bliss. I got better based on my therapists' encouragement and my previous habits of acting on the principles of neuroplasticity, the foundation of all learning.

There was no magic to it. Our brains develop the ability to read, write and speak well at an early age without any instructions.

afflicted by a stroke will require the motivation and practice that the original process of language-by-absorption did not need. That is the difference but it is a big difference.

Signed:

The Johnny Appleseed of Aphasia Awareness.

"It is always a matter of experience in action; or practice; in other words, of education. Every person is the author of his own skills, yet the physical constitution with which he starts is the same. It is the man himself who produces his own perfectionment." Pg. 73.

The Absorbent Mind (1949), Maria Montessori

After damage from a stroke, the road to recovery from aphasia will continue to proceed down the original language-activity environment path. But the difference is that subsequent language recovery after