

# Aphasia Insights!

October 2019  
Volume 1, Issue 12  
October 22, 2019

“Feedback thus is a “consequence” of performance.”

Hattie J, Timperley H. The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research*, (March 2007); Vol. 77, No. 1, pp. 81-112.

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

Stroke Educator, Inc.  
541 Domenico Circle  
St. Augustine, FL 32086  
207-798-1449  
[tbroussa@comcast.net](mailto:tbroussa@comcast.net)  
[www.strokeeducator.com](http://www.strokeeducator.com)

## Feedback is an Important Part of Aphasia Recovery.

By Tom Broussard, Ph.D.

Feedback is a necessary step in aphasia recovery but it is difficult to find. After several weeks of therapy after my stroke, the word “feedback” started to appear in my mind. I had been getting some amount of “feedback” in terms of the progress report I would get every week or two from my therapist. I would read them as best I could and assumed that I was getting better (based on the objective reports), but I still wasn’t sure what “getting better” would really look like.

The reports stated that my correct responses were (for the most part) all going up; from 60% to 70% or 80% to 90%. It was not unlike the grades I used to get in school. My grades in school were always improving but I was never sure if I was in fact, learning. (That is probably the case for all of us, damaged or not!)

When it comes to a person with aphasia (PWA), it is much more difficult to create the feedback that

works for them. It was one thing to get a report once a week that was based on the quizzes and tests I had conducted just one hour of therapy a week. As I started with additional activities, outside of therapy, I began to see additional feedback opportunities that *did* work for me.

Of course, feedback opportunities can only come as a result of useful (and therapeutic) activities that provide the feedback in the first case. The progress reports were somewhat helpful but there were no real-time feedback that could be used as the tool they were designed to be. And more than that, the feedback that is needed, requires regular day-to-day activities that provide the opportunity for minute-to-minute feedback in the moment to occur at all.

As I generated more and more self-initiated activities, the more I could “experience” the feedback that came from those activities.

Writing in my diary (almost 500 pages in two years), I could see (sometimes but not always) misspelled words. Being able to appreciate the presence of a misspelled word was feedback that I could feel. If I could



consciously feel an error, I think the brain could feel it too. And if the brain could feel the errors, the neural networks noted the errors and provided unconscious feedback leading to a more conscious realization of sub-conscious activities that led to improvement.

If I could tell and was aware of misspelled words but still couldn't spell them correctly, I used the online dictionaries (and there are many) that allowed me to find and correct the word. The dictionaries also provided the audio version of the written word. I used www.dictionary.com a hundred times a day (as noted in my diary notes) to check and listen to problematic words. Conscious as well as unconscious feedback provided similar amounts of therapeutic energy.

I started recording my voice (202 recordings in two years) and listened to it every time I recorded it, sometimes more than once. I imagine that it provided some amount of unconscious feedback but it wasn't until after I had them all transcribed that I got to see (and had become conscious of the written errors) the additional feedback that came as a result of the written version of the audio recordings.

I took hundreds of pictures of the world around me (250 +) while walking around town. I took many pictures of signs on the street that I still couldn't read. But taking

pictures allowed me to replay the event by trying to read the signs at home. When it was still too difficult for me to understand, I would give the pictures to my wife and asked her to tell me what it said. There were some signs of written materials that took months for me to be able to read them on my own.

**Feedback is a reverberation of the initial activities and subsequent plasticity that creates ripples of increasing recognition from the initial source and a more conscious understanding and reflection of the resultant learning.**

As important as feedback is, there is no feedback without the activities that provide the initial impulse that trigger plasticity in the first case. No activity; no plasticity, and as a result, no feedback.

Feedback is nothing more than an extended type of the experience-dependent continuum of activities.

Feedback is a reverberation of the initial activities and subsequent plasticity that creates ripples of increasing recognition from the initial source and a more conscious understanding and reflection of the resultant learning.

Signed: *The Johnny Appleseed of Aphasia Awareness.*