

Aphasia Insights!

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"I am completely different. I've been through a metamorphosis...I feel as if I woke up one morning to find myself completely different...I am just not the same person I was three months ago. (p. 69).

Turning Points: How people change, through crisis and commitment. (1979) Ellen Goodman

Ellen Goodman is an American journalist and syndicated columnist. She was a Pulitzer Prize in 1980. She is also a speaker and commentator. (Wikipedia)

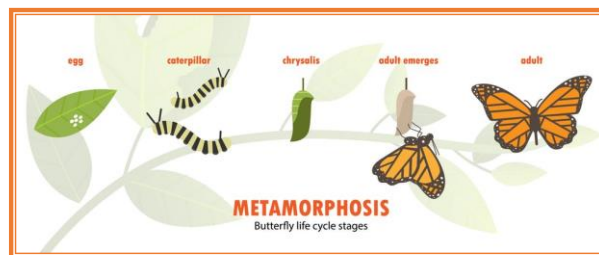
Stroke Educator, Inc. is committed to educating the wider public about stroke and the 50 state *"Aim High for Aphasia!"* Aphasia Awareness Campaign.

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The Metamorphosis from Stroke Survivor to Stroke Educator.

By Tom Broussard, Ph.D.

I have been asked many times how it was that I became a stroke educator. The metaphor of the metamorphosis from a caterpillar to a butterfly comes to mind. It is an apt description of the process of a person with aphasia who could not read, write, or speak well, but ultimately got better. It is a big deal to a butterfly who can't fly.



After losing my language, the only thing I could do *was* think. It has been said that people with aphasia “have lost their language but not their intellect”. I spent months (and then years) *thinking* about the process of recovery without knowing that the thinking *itself* was part and parcel of recovery.

I would like to say that I got better by accident but that is not completely true. I did regain my language with persistent effort and that is true. But I didn't realize that *persistent effort* was the code word *for* recovery. The effort itself is tantamount to recovery. If ever there was a “cause and effect” process, this is it. The cause is partly responsible for the effect,

and the effect is partly dependent upon the cause.

Before my stroke, it was my habit to read, write and speak regularly. I read hundreds of books (albeit mostly science fiction) in school during the summer. I wrote thousands of articles, newsletters, essays, grants, and presentations throughout my life. I interviewed over 25,000 people in my career development business. I did not know that my old habit in this regard would actually help me later.

I was never told about the if/then scenario of effort and recovery. I never knew that I could get better if I could just practice my language as if it was a fulltime job.

A caterpillar becomes a butterfly with no conscious idea of the change that is happening within it. It just happens. Similarly, my language got better with no conscious idea that the activities *themselves*, and the changes they induced, were the active ingredients of my recovery.

Another chicken and egg conundrum; what comes first, the chicken or the egg? In this case, the effort induces more change and the resultant change induces more effort.

I wish I had been able to write down *exactly* what I was thinking and observing during that time but of course I couldn't.

But I did write in my diary and recorded my voice with highly imperfect records of what I was thinking at the time. It turned out that the activities themselves, whether perfect or not, induced the neural changes and the resultant improvement in my language.

As a result of relearning my language, I became more of an educator and was able to share my experience with other caterpillars on their way to becoming butterflies.

Signed: *The Johnny Appleseed of Aphasia Awareness.*