

# Aphasia Insights!

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*“Those actions which appear the most insignificant, if only they are constantly repeated, will form for us in the course of weeks or months or years an enormous total which is inscribed in organic memory in the form of ineradicable habits (pg. 209).”*

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

**Jules Payot, a friend of Santiago Ramon y Cajal (1898), Pioneer of modern Neuroscience.**

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 Decoupage:* applying one coat of learning at a time.

*By Tom Broussard, Ph.D.*

I had my first stroke and aphasia in 2011 and could not read, write or speak well. I got better in stages; 11 months for awareness, 2 years to speak well and 2 more years to write well, almost five years in all.

During those years, I spent much of my time thinking and reflecting about my past. I thought about my Mom (Meme) and my Grandma (Bit), who were both very crafty. Meme did a lot of decoupage and Bit was a seamstress, and they both travelled a lot.

Decoupage is the art of cutting and gluing paper cutouts onto various items (small boxes, wooden handbags, furniture) in combination with paint and other decorative elements. An item is covered by cutouts from magazines, cards or other manufactured papers.

As each of the cutouts are laid down, each layer is sealed with multiple coats of varnish. After the

varnishes dry, the surface is sanded before the next varnish is applied. It often takes 30 to 40 layers of varnish and sanding for the "stuck on" appearance of the papers to disappear and begin to look like painting or inlay work with a polished finish.

*Decoupage* is an odd word (not unlike *aphasia*) such that you won't know about it unless you knew someone who did. The word decoupage can be a noun or a verb.



Christmas decoupage gift from Betty Broussard, "For Tommy, BB, Xmas, 1970."

I always liked watching my mom do her "decoupage" using many of the stamps I had saved when my parents or my grandma were on travel. The stamps were colorful with historical dates and pictures from around the world.

I especially liked the process of "painting & sanding" over and over again. My mother had a variety of sanding papers to roughen the surface of each coat of the varnish.

After many coats of varnish and sanding, she used finer and finer sanding paper. I remember at the end, she used steel wool and then, Kleenex. She wanted to make sure that the stamps under the "glass"

(under the varnish) were clear and perfect with no scratches.

The repetitive process provided me as a child with an understanding of incremental change (at the microscopic level) without yet knowing the language of learning and consolidation that came with it.

After my stroke, and after I became more aware of improvements in my language, I could *feel* the shift beneath me.

The stumbling “stick built” appearance of my broken-down language became “smoother” without my knowing that I was practicing (“painting, sanding, and polishing”) my language, in the same way that I had seen my mom laying down layer after layer of varnish with newly bonded material.

Metaphorically, language improvement from aphasia and other brain diseases and disorders appear to use a similar process by applying various language activities (reading, writing and speaking) with repetition and intensity, encoding newly bonded learning in the same way as decoupage.

*Aphasia* decoupage applies learning, one coat at a time.

Signed: *The Johnny Appleseed of Aphasia Awareness*