

Aphasia Insights!

September 2022
Volume 4, Issue 11
September 20, 2022

“I shall reconsider human knowledge by starting from the fact that *we can know more than we can tell.*”

**Michael Polanyi,
Scientist, (3/11/1891-
2/22/1976)**

The Tacit Dimension.
Michael Polanyi,
Gloucester, MA, Peter
Smith, 1966 (1983).

Aphasia Nation, Inc. is committed to educating the wider public about stroke and aphasia and the “*Aim High for Aphasia!*” international Aphasia Awareness campaign.

Stroke Educator, Inc.
4 Aspen Drive
Brunswick, ME 04011
207-798-1449
tbroussa@comcast.net
www.strokeeducator.com
www.aphasianation.org
FB: DrTomBroussard
FB: StrokeEducatorInc
FB: AphasiaNationInc

Reading the Landscape of Aphasia, from a Person with Aphasia: Part 3, Aphasia Recovery.

By Tom Broussard, Ph.D.

There are three parts to the *Reading the Landscape of Aphasia* series:

Part 1, aphasia awareness points out that many hospitals do not utilize the lexicon (the language) of aphasia on their website (Aphasia

Insights! Vol. 4, Issue 2, *Reading the Landscape of Aphasia, Part 1, Aphasia Awareness* (2-22-2022).

Part 2, aphasia therapy calls for higher education to study the relationship between patients, their pre-stroke environment, their post-stroke environment, and their recovery outcomes (Aphasia Insights! Vol. 4, Issue 8, *Reading the Landscape of Aphasia, Part 2, Aphasia Therapy* (7-12-2022).

Part 3, aphasia recovery describes the changing roles of speech therapists and people with aphasia (PWA) that share in an

increasingly self-directed approach to adult learning, lifelong learning, and long-term personal speech therapy.

After my stroke, my speech therapy took place twice a week for 30 minutes each plus homework. I enjoyed the sessions and my homework but I didn't know that the activities themselves were the essential ingredients needed for recovery.

Andragogy (adult learning)

1. Self-directed
2. Learning from others
3. Learning from one's life experience
4. Relevant
5. Hands-on experience
6. Motivation

As the weeks went by, I started keeping a diary, recording my voice, and taking pictures while walking, often for miles. It was my habit to keep track of my life (diary, calendar,

pictures, etc.) before my stroke and they were always fun. But I had no idea until later that my “fun” turned out to be highly therapeutic too.

At my final speech therapy session, my speech language pathologist (SLP) told me that she was petitioning for a few more hours of therapy that could be helpful. I thanked her but told her it was time for me to start the next stage of my recovery.

It is now almost 11 years since my stroke, and I have come to

understand several of the principles of andragogy (adult learning) that I had experienced which led to my recovery. These long-term, personal speech therapy and associated activities should be included in every SLPs therapeutic portfolio. Here are some:

1. Self-directed
2. Learning from others
3. Learning from one's life experience
4. Relevant
5. Hands-on experience
6. Motivation

Self-directed - Self-directed can also mean habit-directed. Everything I did was self & habit-directed. I wasn't told to write a 500-page diary, record my voice for two years, or take hundreds of pictures of the world around me. My habits, built over years, were ready to take the therapeutic stage without yet knowing when the curtain might go up. SLP-Ask about your patients' life and successful habits at the start!

Learn from others - I never met another person with stroke and aphasia until four months after my stroke when I joined a university stroke group. It was an incredible learning experience to meet 12 stroke survivors with their own story to tell, deficits to explain, timelines to trace, and ongoing recovery, all in their own words. SLP-Introduce us to other people with aphasia sooner rather than later!

Learn from one's life experience - I built ships for the Navy and always reflected on the building

process of assembling little pieces of steel into bigger and bigger assemblies that become a warship. When I lost my language, I thought about the little pieces of my syntax and grammar and wondered if I had lost letters, words or whole sentences. SLP-Tell us on day one how the brain rebuilds our language!

Relevant - There were all kinds of topics that were suggested for us to talk about in the stroke group. Some of the topics included; food, family, sports, music, current events, employment, or geography. I only responded if I knew the topic well or could see the metaphor in my mind that prompted me to talk about it. SLP-Ask us what is relevant or significant to US!

Hands-on experience - I started writing, reading and speaking daily for hours at a time, using my brain in a more hands-on, direct way. It provided me with what was needed to induce experience-dependent neuroplasticity and the resultant learning, without yet knowing it at the time. SLP-Tell us from the start that persistent cognitive activity is the key to recovery!

Motivation - I *wanted* to go to therapy. I *wanted* to do my homework. I *wanted* my language to get better. But I still didn't know if all my "wishes" were just castles in the air. SLP-Tell us that *The Little Engine That Could*, and the "I think I can, I think I can" motto is more than half the battle!

Summary - In many ways, SLPs are as much cheerleaders as

anything else. That is a good thing. Cheerleaders build enthusiasm and set a great example of motivation, spirit, and positive energy. People with stroke and aphasia are lucky to get cheerleaders like this on their team.

But the principles of adult learning should also be applied to PWAs while they are still in the game. If SLPs are the cheerleaders, PWA are the players and must be coached about the self-directed approach to long-term personal therapy long before the sprint ends and the marathon begins.

Signed: *Johnny Appleseed of Aphasia Awareness*

The author is a three-time stroke survivor and aphasia. He could not read, write or speak well which took years to recover.

He is now Founder and President, Aphasia Nation, Inc., a non-profit organization whose mission is educating the wider public, national and international, about aphasia and plasticity, the foundation of all learning.

