

# Aphasia Insights!

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“Action seems to follow feeling, but really action and feeling go together; and by regulating the action, which is under the more direct control of the will, we can indirectly regulate the feeling, which is not.”

**Dale Carnegie, [How to Win Friends and Influence People](#)**. Simon and Schuster, New York (1936, pp.70).

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

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## *Jules Payot and The Education of the Will.*

By Tom Broussard, Ph.D.

This is the next in a series of articles about the science and scientists behind the brain, stroke, aphasia, plasticity and recovery.

**Jules Payot** was born and died in Chamonix, France (10 April 1859 - 30 January 1940) at 80 years old. He was a French educator and was appointed rector at the Academy of Aix at Aix-Marseille University in Aix-en-Provence in 1907 ([Wikipedia](#)).

[Aix-Marseille University](#) is a public research university and was founded in 1409 when Louis II of Anjou, Count of Provence, helped establish the University of Provence (Aix-en-Provence, France) making it one of the oldest universities in continuous operation in the world ([Wikipedia](#)).

Very little is known about Payot’s life and career other than his books including, *Will-power and Work*, and *The Education of the Will* which became famous, as mentioned in the Preface to the Twenty-Seventh edition, “...has been translated into most European tongues” (Payot, 1907, pp. xxi). The first edition was published in 1893.

It would appear that it was translated into Spanish as well, given that Santiago Ramón y Cajal remarked in his book, [Advice for a Young Investigator](#), “If our professions do not allow us to devote more than two hours a day to a subject, do not abandon the work on the pretext that we need four or six. As Payot wisely noted, ‘A little each day is enough, as long as a little is produced each day.’” (Cajal, 1999 (1898), pp. 38).

[The Education of the Will](#) was the result of four years of study and



**Jules Payot  
(1859-1949)**

meditation using the ‘educating of the will’ as the subject that required “prolonged and persevering intellectual work” as the tool and the method to bring about self-mastery (Payot, 1907, pp. xii).

In addition, “meditative reflection” is “an indispensable element in the education of the will, but by itself it is powerless” (Payot, 1907, pp. 208). “This crystallization of our energy into habits can not be accomplished by meditative reflection; it requires action” (Payot, 1907, pp. 210).

As a result, it is crucial “to combine action with meditation: indispensable, because it alone can form firmly established habits, and, what is more, can transform those very acts, which were at first most disagreeable to us,

into necessities of existence” (Payot, 1907, pp. 217) and that, as William James said, “*habit diminishes the conscious attention with which our actions are performed.*” (James, 1887, pp. 8).

The simple act of action can become pleasurable too, as Payot wrote, “that lies in action itself, a pleasure so intense that many people live an active life for the sake of the activity” and “gives us a realizing sense of our own existence and our own strength (Payot, 1907, pp. 216-217).

We all know the story of the tortoise and the hare. Payot noted the “tremendous efficacy of slow actions that are indefinitely repeated” (Payot, 1907, pp. 209) where slow and steady wins the race. Although Payot could see that those activities which appear to be “the most insignificant, if only they are constantly repeated” were the cause that were “inscribed in organic memory in the form of ineradicable habits” (Payot, 1907, pp. 208).

Payot could see the ‘cause and effect’ that his recommendations had engendered in his students’ behavior, as he was just beginning to learn about plasticity but didn’t yet know about the underlying neurological process, noting that “for each new learning event, there is some necessary and sufficient change in the nervous system that supports the learning” (Kleim et al, 2008, pp. 226).

John Dewey, an American educator, saw the same issue. “At bottom,” he wrote, “this principle rests upon the fact of habit, *when habit is interpreted biologically.* The basic characteristic of habit is that every experience enacted and undergone modifies the one who acts and undergoes, while

this modification affects, whether we wish it or not...” A new and different person emerged with every new experience (Dewey, 1938, pp. 35).

More than that, “those *habits as really shaping that Mechanism,* whose subsequent action mainly determines our ... character, and, consequently, the whole course of our conscious lives” (Carpenter, 1888, pp. 351).

As William James remarked, “Plasticity, then, in the wide sense of the word, means the possession of a structure weak enough to yield to an influence, but strong enough not to yield all at once ... Organic matter, especially nervous tissue, seems endowed with a very extraordinary degree of plasticity of this sort...*the phenomena of habit in living beings are due to the plasticity of the organic materials of which their bodies are composed*” (James, 1890, Vol. 1, pp. 105).

Plasticity converts thinking and repetitive cognitive activities into new brain matter and new learning. But in order to start, the learning engine requires personal effort and sustainable activities that can be rendered at the cellular level in order to run the motor. Educating the will is the key not just to memorize facts and acquire book knowledge, but to turn one’s knowledge “to account” and arrive at a new level of self-mastery (Payot, 1907, pp. xi).

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Signed: *The Johnny Appleseed of Aphasia Awareness*

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

He is 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.

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