Art and Aphasia: A Literary Review and Exhibition

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“If all my possessions were taken from me with one exception, I would choose to keep the power of communication, for by it I would soon regain all the rest”

Daniel Webster
Aphasia

• Aphasia is a language processing disorder; it does not affect perception, muscle activity, or thought processes (Damasio, 1992)
• Aphasia manifests in various forms
• Affects language related to auditory stimuli, visual stimuli, text, and arbitrary symbols (Damasio, 1991)

http://www.aphasiathemovie.com/Aphasia_Project/Carl_in_the_Classroom_2009.html
Types of Aphasia

• Three Categories:
  – Expressive
  – Receptive
  – Global
Expressive Aphasia

• Broca’s aphasia
  – damage to the language areas of the frontal lobe interruptions or cease of function for motor planning in speech and agrammatism (Fundukian, 2011; Damasio, 1992)
  – retains comprehension abilities while losing the capacity to produce speech, use of single-word utterances or short sentences produced with great effort
Expressive, high-fire glazed ceramic, 2014
Receptive Aphasia

• Wernicke’s aphasia
  – damage to the temporal lobe (dominant area of language) uninhibited motor functioning and extreme deficits in comprehension and meaning (Fundukian, 2011)
  – ex. long, fluent sentences that do not correspond to a prompt or to any intended topic; words are strung together with no relation; unintelligible
Receptive, high-fire glazed ceramic, 2014
Global Aphasia

• a combination of the expressive and receptive symptoms in which an individual loses nearly all aspects of language
• comprehension is severely affected, deliberate speech is minimal, and many physical problems (hemiplegia) commonly accompany the diagnosis (Damasio, 1992)
• every case is unique
Art Therapy

- American Art Therapy Association defines art therapy as:
  
  … a mental health profession in which clients, facilitated by the art therapist, use art media, the creative process, and the resulting artwork to explore their feelings, reconcile emotional conflicts, foster self-awareness, manage behavior and addictions, develop social skills, improve reality orientation, reduce anxiety, and increase self-esteem. A goal in art therapy is to improve or restore a client’s functioning and his or her sense of personal well-being.
Typical Therapy

• Assessment
  • Multiple tests
• Must reflect patient’s wants, needs, and abilities
• Move from ‘fixing’ people to being “life-enabling and life-sustaining”
• Remain objective and supportive (Laska, Hellblom, Murray, Kahan, & von Arbin, 2001) – Family vs. community volunteer
Self Portrait, high-fire glazed ceramic, 2014
Accessibility of Art Therapy

• Range of difficulty in materials
  – Some readily familiar (i.e. photography)
  – Photovoice Project- rural Chinese citizens
• Changes in abilities
  – Hemiplegic, left neglect, etc.
• Permanent as opposed to speech
• New communication- new habits

*Different from fine art; come overlap
• *Fundamentals of Art Therapy* author Shaun McNiff describes his experience with art therapy clients, saying, “people always had a need to talk about what they do…by describing interpretation as dialogue, there is an implied respect for the image” (1988)
  – Difference between labeling and finding meaning
Self Portrait, mixed media, 2014
Benefits of Art Therapy

• Art therapy is shown to improve communication skills in rehabilitation therapy for stroke survivors (Kim, Kim, Lee, & Chun, 2008).
  – Sense of achievement, contact with different communication modalities, conceptualize semantic meaning

• The complexity of human experience cannot be entirely reduced to words (Edwards, 2004).
Benefits Continued

- Lyon (1995) emphasis not on *drawing*, but *communicating*
- Progress in cognitive abilities show specifically after introduction of art therapy (Kim, Kim, Lee, and Chun, 2008)
Art and Aspects of Language

• Visual images are used along with language by normal adults in planning and execution of activities in daily life (Lyon & Helm-Estabrooks, 1987)

• Main areas of language:
  – Syntax
  – Semantics
  – Pragmatics
Syntax

• Form of Language
  – Grammar, rules, structure
• Art can be sequential or fixed (Sacchett, Byng, Marshall, & Pound, 1999)
• Less expectation for ”success”
Semantics

• Meaning of Language
• Symbolic meaning, intent
• Improves semantic functioning
  – Drawing includes the skills of refining used to see both the whole structure and details of an object; these are similar to the skills used in word selection (Farias, Davis, & Harrington, 2006)
• Added use of music and poetry add to improving semantic functioning (Kaczmarek, 1991)
Pragmatics

• Use of Language
  – Social and personal use, appropriate to situation
• Pachalska (1991)- group therapy efficacy
  • Safe environment free of social penalties, interact with others living with aphasia
  • Serves communicative, social, mental, and emotional needs
    – Holistic practices
What Makes Us Human, low-fire glazed ceramic, 2014
Effects of Lateralization

- RH people develop language in left hemisphere, LH people in the right hemisphere.
  - LH more likely to develop aphasia- better recovery (Fundukian, 2011)

- Drawing activates areas in the right hemisphere, as opposed to traditional therapy that uses routes in the linguistic left hemisphere (Farias, Davis, & Harrington, 2006)
Preferred Hand, wood-fire glazed ceramic, 2014
**Effects on Artistic Renderings**

- Lyon and Helm-Estabrooks -brain damage to the left hemisphere may produce drawings that reflect a working right brain with simplified details and recognizable forms (1987)
- People with right brain damage would then produce drawings indicative of proper left functioning showing details, no outer form, and a lack of spatial awareness
Left Brain Damage

Right-hemisphere injury

Linguistic

Nonlinguistic

Stimulus
Right Brain Damage
Drawing as Compensatory Strategy

• Farias, Davis, and Harrington (2006) found drawing improved naming abilities in people with aphasia
• Need to communicate idea by supplementing speech
  – Jack and Bonnie
• Aided in self-cuing
  – Compared to other strategies (writing, gesture, etc)
Drawing as Language

• Person is unable to use speech as primary mode (Helm-Estabrooks & Martin)

• Responsibility falls on person with aphasia to create recognizable drawings to relay messages (Lyon & Helm-Estabrooks, 1987)
  – Flexible, creative, and self-driven
  – May involve multiple images to convey complex concepts
Tip of the Tongue, high-fire glazed ceramic, 2014
Conclusion

• Besides proven emotional benefits for coping with acquired disorders, art can also function as a viable and effective mode of communication for people with aphasia.

• Art as research

• Art and language are manifestations of symbolic meaning and reasoning. A combined use of art, holistic health, and speech language pathology would unite disciplines based in symbolism to more effectively study disorders that affect them.
• Thank you!
• Questions?