

The UofSC Aphasia Lab Newsletter

**Research and Community Activities for People with Aphasia,
Their families and the Rehabilitation Professionals Who Work
with Them**

A Letter from Dr. Julius Fridriksson



Dear all,

As I write these lines we are in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Aphasia Lab has been closed down. These last few weeks have been very challenging for many and it is not straightforward to see what the future holds with regarding to turning back to some kind of normalcy. So far, it seems like most of the news we hear about the outbreak is on the negative side. The death toll keeps increasing and the number of new infections is on the rise in every state of the country. Closing the lab was not a difficult decision and we did so ahead of the rest of the University as we knew that some of the persons with aphasia who participate in our studies could be at greater risk for COVID-19 complications.

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Stay Connected with the Lab!

Website: <https://web.asph.sc.edu/aphasia/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/StrokeRecoveryProject/>

A Letter from Dr. Julius Fridriksson (Cont.)

In spite of the difficulties associated with the pandemic, we continue to be very productive and everyone in the Aphasia Lab is now working from home. Our large therapy study is almost over and the results so far look very interesting. What we have found is that persons with mild-to-moderate aphasia tend to respond better to speech therapy compared to those with very severe aphasia. We are also seeing things like 'younger age' as being associated with better therapy outcome. Although some of the early results are very promising, we have not completed data collection. In fact, we are gearing up to change our study so that all testing and therapy will now occur online via the Internet. Making this change has been somewhat challenging but we are fortunate to have outstanding staff who now have us up and running with the online format.

As our large therapy study comes to an end, we are hoping to start another project early next year that also involves aphasia therapy. We are waiting to see whether the National Institutes of Health, the agency that funds our current research, will agree to provide us with continued support. If everything works out like we hope it will, there is a good chance we will be in touch with you sometime early next year about getting involved in this new therapy research. We'll keep you posted!

Now, getting back to the COVID-19 pandemic: As the government continues to encourage social isolation, we understand that this can be an especially challenging time for people who are already having a difficult time with isolation due to having aphasia. If you have not already done so, I would encourage you to get involved in our aphasia groups or Lunch Bunch program. Both the aphasia groups and the Lunch Bunch are now meeting online and the response we have gotten so far has been amazing. To get involved, you can contact Dr. Leigh Ann Spell or Lynsey Keator.

In closing, I want to say that in spite of the uncertain times, I am very optimistic about the future. We are starting to get a better handle on who responds best to what kind of aphasia therapy. As importantly, this has given us some 'food for thought' to come up with new approaches to aid recovery among those who otherwise are unlikely to recover (e.g. older persons with very severe aphasia). As always, I can't thank enough those of you who have participated in our research studies so far. Without your help, we would not get anything accomplished. I am eternally grateful!

Best wishes from Blythewood, SC.

Julius

From the State House Steps to Online Streaming

Alison Dinkins, Graduate Assistant

Connection is one of the main objectives of the work we do in the UofSC Aphasia Lab. For individuals with aphasia, connection--to treatment with a speech-language pathologist, to other people with aphasia and their loved ones, and to their communities and the world around them--is an essential component of the rehabilitation process. In an attempt to reduce the spread of COVID-19, necessary precautions and social distancing measures in everyday life have challenged our ability to stay connected. Navigating this "new normal" has proven difficult for most, but the disability community has continued to exhibit its ability to adapt and overcome in the face of overwhelming obstacles.

This resilience was put on display when the 7th annual Advocacy Day for Access and Independence, a yearly large-scale gathering of the state's disability community put on by the South Carolina Access and Independence Network, was transitioned to an entirely virtual event. Explained by Able SC Public Relations Director Sarah Nichols, "Advocacy Day is a gathering of the disability community and anyone who supports the disability community in South Carolina. We celebrate how far the disability community has come, and we acknowledge all of the work that needs to be done for people with disabilities to achieve true equity in this state. We encourage people to take action and speak up about the issues affecting the disability community, and urge their representatives to act on them." Organizers had a grand total of two weeks to convert the event to a digital streaming format. "We had to work quickly to make sure that we both got the word out about the change, and that we figured out how to create the best and most accessible online event possible. Luckily, we are the disability community, so we already know how to adapt, because we have been doing it our whole lives.", Ms. Nichols noted.

The content of this year's event was focused on access to both community and COVID-19 specific resources, employment first issues, such as ending subminimum wage, and promotion of Census 2020 completion so that the disability community is accurately represented. Ultimately, the goal is that you would leave Advocacy Day with the empowerment to advocate for both yourself and your community. As Ms. Nichols described, "People with disabilities deserve completely equal access to all aspects of society, and we want the community to feel empowered to demand it. We deserve to be included in society, just like everyone else. And we don't just deserve it—it's the law!"



You can access the recorded event @AbleSC on Facebook or Able South Carolina on Youtube!

Staying Connected While Social Distancing

Lallie Bennett, Graduate Assistant

The UofSC Aphasia Lab may be known for its research, but what many participants and lab members look forward to the most are connecting with each other outside of the lab. Lunch Bunch and Friday therapy groups have provided a way for participants to continue to receive support, while also getting to catch up and socialize with one another regularly. As a nation, we are all experiencing a “new normal” of social distancing and working from home. Although we are not able to be in the same room during this trying time, we are finding ways to still be together.

Lynsey Keator, lab member and PhD student, is committed to creating opportunities for participants to stay connected through virtual groups and Lunch Bunch. When asked what motivated her to provide these opportunities, Lynsey said, “Aphasia is pretty isolating as it is and given the circumstances, I was worried these folks would be even more isolated. Staying connected was my primary motivation.” Many of us have probably struggled to maintain a routine during quarantine, which was also a motivation for Lynsey. “For many, Aphasia Groups are part of their routine and an opportunity to socialize outside of the house. Maintaining a schedule and routine is especially important and for as long as this is our ‘new normal’ we will continue to get our participants involved,” she adds.

Traditionally, Lunch Bunch has been held at a local restaurant where participants can share a meal and enjoy each other’s company. Participants are still encouraged to enjoy their lunch from their home as they join virtual Lunch Bunch and learn about the findings from the different research projects they have been involved in. Weekly Aphasia Groups not only provide a chance for participants to connect with each other, but also an opportunity for graduate clinicians to experience providing teletherapy. Lunch bunch and groups are now taking place on an online conferencing app called Zoom. At first, Lynsey was worried about the shift to virtual events and participants’ familiarity and access to technology. Since the events have started, Lynsey says she has been impressed by everyone’s eagerness to participate and level of accessibility.



Speech-language pathologists, Allison Croxton and Sara Sayers, having fun while using zoom from their homes in Columbia and Lexington.

Staying Connected While Social Distancing (Cont.)

When Marcus Ryninger first heard about the opportunity to participate in events online, he said his initial reaction was that “this was going to be a new adventure. I didn’t know too much about Zoom and online meetings so was kind of intimidated.” Many of us are new to online conferencing, which is why Lynsey worked with members to troubleshoot the software before, and even during, meetings. Sharon Ayres, who is also new to videoconferencing, said her transition to online meetings has been “good. Problems at first, but good.”



Lab participant, Marcus Ryninger, attending virtual groups from his home.

Although we miss being together with one another, this situation has presented an opportunity for us to adapt and learn how to stay connected. Marcus states that he “kind of misses being in class and getting together. I miss handshakes. Even in lab and class you see old friends.” He continues to say that he thinks it may be a while before we can all be together again and the online events will only get better as we continue to participate in them. Sharon says her favorite part of participating online is “saying hello. Talking about problems.”

When asked about advice to those who may be hesitant to participate online, Lynsey says “we are all learning right now! It may seem daunting, but it’s worth a try and we are here to help you get connected. Where there is a will, there is a way” She also adds that even if you don’t have a computer or iPad, you can call into the meetings on your phone. Marcus encourages others to try participating more than once. “Sometimes people will try it one time and think it doesn’t work for them. Keep at it, keep trying. Some people might think they don’t get anything out of it, but they may be putting something into it for someone else,” he adds. Sharon’s advice to others is “do it. Been good.” We may not be in the same room, but we are still here learning from one another and building connections. 5

Staying Connected through Research: From Our Homes to Yours

Dr. Leigh Ann Spell, SLP and Associate Director of the UofSC Aphasia Lab

On March 11th, 2020, we received word from the University of South Carolina (UofSC) that we would be closing down campus temporarily. At the time, we thought we would be away from the UofSC Aphasia Lab for just 2-3 weeks. Our staff contacted participants to put their research session visits on hold but we thought that we would definitely be back at the Lab after the end of March. Needless to say, THAT didn't happen!

The COVID 19 quarantine was keeping our staff and participants at home for their safety, but was there a way to continue our research and connect in a different way? Luckily, with some fantastic teamwork and collaboration with other aphasia research centers around the country, we were able to come up with a plan. We decided to connect to our participants through teletherapy! Our largest treatment study right now is called "Predicting Outcomes of Language Rehabilitation" or POLAR. Many of our participants have been involved in this study and we would still like to enroll many more now that we are in the study's final year.



Speech-Language Pathologist, Michele Martin, works from her picturesque home office on Lake Murray in Lexington.

Here is where the teamwork and collaboration came in. First, Roger Newman-Norlund helped our speech-language pathologists get apps loaded on their own and new participant laptop computers. From there, our fabulous team of speech-language pathologists, Mary Aitchison, Michele Martin, Allison Croxton, Sara Sayers, Anna Doyle and Skyler Fontenot, spent weeks adapting both testing and treatment tasks to be administered online through a video-conferencing platform called "zoom". That included help from our students and hours of practicing and tweaking the materials and technology to make them accessible to participants both near and far.

In addition to adapting all of our assessment and therapy activities, we also created Teletherapy Kits which are now shipped to participants who are enrolled in the POLAR study. These kits include a laptop with a touchscreen preloaded with our treatment activities and the zoom software for easy connection between a participant and his/her therapist. A headset with a microphone, and a WiFi hotspot for participants who may not have an Internet WiFi connection at their home is also included.

We are just getting started with this new way of doing aphasia clinical research and we are excited about all of the possibilities. While everyone learns how to deal with the COVID 19 quarantine, we are truly excited about finally being able to connect with our participants and their families. Perhaps we will be able to virtually connect with you soon! If you have not yet participated in the POLAR study and think you might be interested in this new teletherapy format, please contact Leigh Ann Spell at SpellL@mailbox.sc.edu for more information.

Playing with Words: On Zoom!

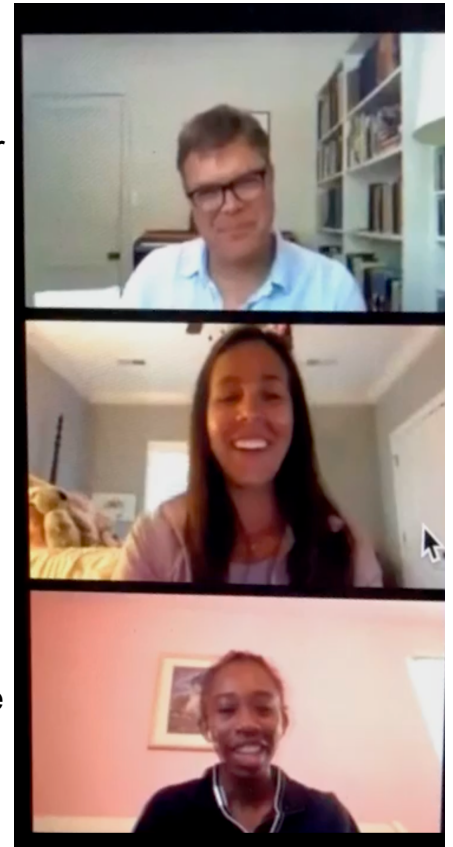
Anja Derry and Anne Elise Nicoladis, Graduate Assistants

When South Carolina's campus closed, members of Playing with Words: An Aphasic Drama Group thought this would be the end of their weekly practices, but the group adapted. Dr. Dirk den Ouden of the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders and Dr. Peter Duffy of the Department of Theatre and Dance, along with their students, collaborate to offer weekly theater practices for people with aphasia. Practices look similar to any other theatre group. They play fun and challenging improvisation games to practice acting skills and work towards an end of semester play performance. Last year, the performance was extremely successful, and members were looking forward to performing again this May. However, due to the global pandemic resulting from COVID-19, everyone is adjusting to the new normal of social distancing.

Social distancing policies did not stop the drama group! While others are working from home, they are now acting from home! Dirk and Peter decided to hold virtual drama club practices via Zoom to allow the members and students to continue to see each other and work on their improv skills. So far, our members are doing a wonderful job at continuing to attend practices and adapting to the new format. Peter and Dirk implemented exercises that are able to be completed virtually, but still allow everyone to feel as connected as they did in-person. Group members have shared that they look forward to meeting each week, which is apparent in the laughter and huge smiles we see each Friday during group! Members mentioned that they are sad that we will not be able to continue with our original May performance date, but we are hoping to find a new date for the performance in the Fall.

In addition, this has been a new opportunity for Dirk and Peter to modify the typical drama practice to be conducted online. When asked to give his opinion on the new virtual format, Dirk said, "It has been inspiring to see the positive spirit in the group, and how the actors are adapting to the new format. There is plenty of opportunity for drama on a webcam! At the same time, we know we have not been able to get all the members of the group online, so I hope we can find a way to involve everyone again, at some point."

Sam Kazimer, a Masters student helping with the club, adds "It goes without saying that this has all been a really big adjustment for everyone! The one thing I look forward to every week is the virtual drama practice! It is such an amazing experience. I think we had all gotten so close during our in-person practices that the transition to online was super easy. Our participants have been beyond enthusiastic about taking part in our fun and out of the box exercises. I never knew I could have so much fun with a group of people through a computer screen!"



Drama club students sing Happy Birthday to Dr. Den Ouden during practice.

The UofSC Aphasia Lab

Communication Sciences and Disorders
Columbia, SC 29208

[Recipient]

Address Line 1

Address Line 2

Address Line 3

Address Line 4

Resources to Access During COVID-19

Columbia Adjusted Store Hours:

Publix: 7-8 AM (Tuesday/Wednesday)

Target: First hour (Tuesday/Wednesday)

Kroger: 7-8 AM (Monday- Thursday)

Costco: 8-9 AM (Tuesday-Thursday)

Sam's Club: 7-9 AM (Tuesday/Thursday)

Aldi: 8:30-9:30 AM (Tuesday/Thursday)

Online Grocery Delivery:

Instacart: www.instacart.com

At-Home Therapy Practice:

Tactus Therapy App, "Lite" versions of apps are free in the app store

<https://tactustherapy.com>

Some Good News w/ John Krasinski:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F5pgG1M_h_U

Kindle:

Free, 2-month subscription for audiobooks, magazines, and e-books

www.amazon.com/kindleunlimited

Richland Library: www.richlandlibrary.com

- ♦ **Whatcha Got Cookin'?:** Includes cookbooks and recipes
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