

Theoretical and Methodological Considerations in
Aphasia Research and Practice: Introduction

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This conference was founded some 16 years ago, in the Sonny and Cher era, in recognition of the deepfelt need for a forum for clinical aphasiologists. A strong feeling seemed to exist that other organizations and academies were embroiled in endless navel-contemplating and tail-chasing debates of issues that had been beaten to a guacamole-like pulp since at least 1861. Some clinical aphasiologists became mildly nauseated by tape-loop reruns of soliloquies and dialogues on the topics of mind-brain dualism, the relationship of language to intelligence, and the apparent perpetual-motion fascination with "where, oh where can the lesion be?"

Questions and issues of application seemed to have at least equal merit to those of explanation, and so, for these 16 years, we have focused rather sharply on such matters as "How can we best restore or work around shattered communication?"

But, though we are clinical, this does not mean we are against theory or explanation. We may be atheoretic but we are not antitheoretic. We may be adrift on life's white water without benefit of universally-accepted theory, but that doesn't mean we do not seek one . . . or more.

As George Santayana said in The Sense of Beauty, "We should flounder hopelessly, like the animals, did we not keep ourselves afloat and direct our course by those intellectual devices. Theory helps us bear our ignorance of fact."

Today's panel may not provide an untippable raft, but at least it may point out some swirls and boulders, provide a few life jackets, and maybe, just maybe, give us the seeds of a destination.