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SLP as Action Hero? Film Review of The King's Speech

by Kay T. Payne & Ronald Pearlman

Since *The King's Speech* movie was released, have you noticed an increase in speech-language therapy requests? **Take our poll!**

History has turned a page when a speech-language professional is a lead character on the silver screen. In *The King's Speech* (written by David Seidler, directed by Tom Hooper; December 2010), Lionel Logue might not be an action hero, but he is a hero nonetheless. This award-winning drama projects to sell-out audiences what ASHA professionals experience daily—the joy and pride of success, and the abiding regard and gratitude of clients.

The film is set within the historical context of the pre-World War II scandalous abdication of Edward VIII for his American lover, the reluctant ascension to the throne of George VI, and the impending war. The affectionately eccentric and unorthodox "speech therapist" Logue, expertly played by Geoffrey Rush, coaches the timid stuttering Duke of York through his coronation as King George VI and the ravages of the war. For his brilliant rendition of the king, Colin Firth has received a host of awards and is the favorite for the best actor Oscar. The film effectively uses sound and cinematography to bring the audience the experience of the emotional terror and deep frustration of a person who stutters.

This historical period predates the credentialing of speech-language pathology (or speech and language therapy, in the British parlance) in England and in Logue's native Australia. It was an era when taunting and other absurd techniques such as marbles in the mouth were used to treat stuttering. Although he was called "Doctor," Logue professed to have no formal credentials or training. Relying on instinct alone, Logue did not conduct a diagnosis before beginning his treatment, and immediately declared a motor and breathing problem. Moreover, his treatment methods focused on temporary situational fluency, rather than permanent control and long-term maintenance.

Modern ethics aside, through literary license the plot is prochronistic, showing techniques that are more aligned with modern approaches than with the 1930s and 1940s. Any speech-language pathologist will recognize the modern methods and techniques of our time, including altered

auditory feedback, anti-avoidance, desensitization, air flow, and rhythmic stimulation. From a professional perspective, it is doubtful that that these best practices established by years of empirical research could have been instinctual to Logue.

Nonetheless, the worth if this film for SLPs is not its historical accuracy. It does not claim to be a documentary. Its value is in the recognition of the monumental impact of a speech professional on world history, albeit behind the scenes. As World War II breaks out in Europe, the king, despite his disability, provides inspiring leadership to the British people by fluently broadcasting a speech to the world. In the final scene the viewer travels in agonizing synchrony with George VI down the long, ominous corridor approaching a large and menacing microphone, and afterward feels the king's exuberant triumph. Nominated for 12 Academy Awards, this film is worth seeing by students, professionals, clients, and all who desire a moment of pure inspiration and appreciation for our services.

Film viewers will also enjoy the book by Mark Logue and Peter Conradi, *The King's Speech: How One Man Saved the British Monarchy* (Sterling Publishing, 2010). Authored by Lionel Logue's grandson and a veteran journalist, and based on the actual diaries of Logue, this compelling biography is supplemental reading to the film. In addition, viewers can hear a recording of the actual speech delivered by George VI online.

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