

## A REFLECTION ON THE KING' S SPEECH

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As a speech therapist/pathologist I enjoyed The King's Speech greatly, but was totally unprepared for the tremendous interest shown by almost everyone else, not only those of my age with a childhood memory of the solemnity of the wartime speeches, but younger people too, some of them committed republicans, have been asking me about speech therapy practice. "Is that what you did when you treated stammerers/stutterers?"

When I thought about this I realized, with surprise, that my graduation in Speech Therapy in Melbourne, Australia in 1951 was closer in time to Lionel Logue than to today's speech pathologists. So close that we, with our new diplomas at the end of our three year's study, were very careful to distinguish ourselves from elocutionists, whom we thought unscientific and unprofessional, and guarded our status by accepting for "treatment" only "patients" referred to us by medical doctors.

Some elocutionists or speech and voice teachers, like Logue, had however trained as actors or singers and would have had good information available to them in what was then known about The Anatomy, Physiology, and Hygiene of the Vocal Organs --- the title of a chapter by Lennox Browne FRCS in Miles's Standard Elocution, already into its ninth edition in the second decade of the twentieth century (no publication date given). In an earlier chapter the "earnest attention of the student" is drawn to "pitch, articulation, pronunciation, emphasis, modulation, punctuation or phrasing, pace and pause". We forget now how large a part the spoken word played in entertainment in this period, in recitation, as well as in plays. Many people with speech problems had been helped by practioners from such a background, and indeed it was from amongst those practioners, aware of the limitations of their knowledge, that many of the founders of our own profession came. Lionel Logue was one of them.

Margaret (Peggy) Eldridge, who came to initiate Speech Therapy training in Melbourne in 1945, was a Founder Fellow of the College of Speech Therapists, London, and told a story of a wartime meeting of the founding committee in rooms in Harley St. where the members present continued their meeting under a board room table during an air-raid. Among members of this founding group were Lionel Logue and Leopold Stein, an Austrian psychiatrist with a particular interest in voice and speech. When the all clear siren sounded and Peggy went off to drive an ambulance, Lionel would have gone to his air raid warden duties.

It was Peggy who introduced my class to the problem of stammering. Unlike the problems of resonance and articulation caused by cleft palate, or of language after stroke, it seemed to me vague and mysterious. There were many theories about what caused it; there were methods of treatment which focused almost entirely on the speech mechanism, others that were based on general relaxation and suggestion, and some that seemed close to psychotherapy. As most combined all of these, when patients improved we didn't really know what had worked and why, or how to measure it. Research now

provides sound evidence to guide therapists and information about this can be found elsewhere on this website.

Why did Lionel Logue's methods work? From the little evidence we have I believe that his confidence, his empathy with his clients, and his understanding of the profoundly traumatic nature of a serious impediment to communication, combined with techniques to reduce inappropriate muscle tension and respiratory patterns, and to demonstrate to patients that there were many ways of producing fluent speech were all important. Some of his ways of doing this are surprising, but there are more ways than one to sieve a thistle!