

KINEPHONICS:

A REVOLUTIONARY APPROACH TO LITERACY EDUCATION.

AN INTIATIVE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD

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LEARNING AND TEACHING AID

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ANNA GILL

BACHELOR OF EDUCATION (PRIMARY)

LINGUISTICS MAJOR

UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

DIPLOMA OF PUBLISHING AND EDITING, SYDNEY

Language Studies: traditional grammar; phonics; whole language; Lindamood; Spalding

Other Studies: Edward de Bono's Six Thinking Hats; Multiple Intelligences; Accelerated Learning Techniques; Assessing and catering for Gifted Under-Achievers; Visualisation

Philosophy for children; Mapping Mathematical Thinking for children; Speech development and Communication across the curriculum; Visual perception in children

Experience: 16 years primary teaching; two children; literacy learning support and tutoring.

ANNA GILL

ABN 43 810 214 846

WEBSITE: www.lookatmymouth.com

Correspondence about this paper should be emailed to:

Anna Gill

info@lookatmymouth.com

website address: www.lookatmymouth.com

KINEPHONICS: A REVOLUTIONARY APPROACH TO LITERACY EDUCATION. AN INITIATIVE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD

ANNA GILL

BACHELOR OF EDUCATION (PRIMARY) LINGUISTICS

UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

SUMMARY

The assumption is made that learning to read and write occurs through a combination of many life experiences as well as teaching and learning methods over the first ten years of life and more. It is understood that no single theory of learning is the absolute answer to helping a child learn to read. However, the knowledge of the alphabet is vital for the development of skills in reading and writing.

It is the aim of this paper to present a unique theory of learning to read and spell. A theory that was explored to some degree in a Rudyard Kipling fable in 1901. A theory that has been disregarded until now.

“Kinephonics is a method of learning to articulate, read and spell based on the recognition of the motion of the mouth.” (Anna Gill, 2005). Kinephonics is a combination of the latest theories of brain research and theories of learning.

Kinephonics provides the learner with the adequate phonology needed for the mastery of a writing system. Adequate phonology is achieved as a visual, auditory and kinesthetic knowledge of sounds, not just knowledge from auditory and visual stimulation as the word ‘phonology’ suggests. Phonics has evolved into Kinephonics. Adequate phonology is achieved as present knowledge is extended and connections are made to form new knowledge. In essence, the learner codes sounds into visual representations (or letters).

This paper reviews and interprets the latest significant scientific research with Kinephonics in mind. Much of this research is based on dyslexia. To be recognised as a significant learning theory, Kinephonics must be successful in treating learning difficulties. Research of benefit to children with learning difficulties is presented using ‘Look at my Mouth’- an alphabet book based on the concept of Kinephonics. Consequently, it is assumed that Kinephonics used during early childhood has the potential to benefit all children in their future learning of reading and spelling.

BACKGROUND

Literacy levels are a constant reminder of the strengths of our economies and their future.

Money spent on the building of gaols and on problem teenagers is also a constant reminder of the state of the economy. “More than 10 violent and severely disruptive students are being sent to the state’s (New South Wales, Australia) new suspension centres each month, documents obtained under freedom of information laws show.” (Hall September 4, 2005 The Sun-Herald)

Research shows that learning difficulties in the early years of schooling can be correlated with disruptive students and future problems in everyday life. Also success in the early years of schooling can be correlated with future success in everyday life.

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Much research leads us towards giving children a good start in life by the age of 5 years old. Reading with a parent or carer at a young age provides time for bonding, awareness of spoken language and written language, not to mention the other benefits of helping a child towards literacy.

My contribution to these beliefs began when I started teaching children to read. My goal as a teacher was to teach children to read and at the same time allow them to enjoy the learning experience. I was providing a positive experience of learning and consequently contributing to the future of the economy.

I have been teaching children to read for fifteen years, mostly in high socio-economic communities but have been very involved in outback communities, taught non-English speaking children to read, worked in public hospitals, tutored children up to twelve years old and my most recent teaching experience is as a primary learning support teacher. I have had a good education and was fortunate to go to University mostly to understand the reasons behind my perceived 'problems' with reading and writing. I am also a mother of two boys who have just been through the 'learn to read' process.

I have studied many reading schemes and learning philosophies and last year I had an overwhelming experience which contributed to my passion for teaching reading and writing.

My son's first year of school was not what he expected. He expected to learn to read. He expected to be good at it. Everyone else learned to read and his brother could read.

From the school's perspective, Charlie did progress in his first year but not as quickly as others. As a mother, there were many questions: Why did this happen? Should he have done more pre-reading activities? Why didn't he know the alphabet before he went to school? Who can I blame?

So my ultimate thought was that I never wanted any other child to go through the same anxiety about the first year of school as Charlie did.

My position is more specific than reading stories to children from a young age. It is my belief that, at this young age, children can gain an understanding of reading. More specifically, learning about the complex nature of 'sound' will enable a child to learn to master a writing system.

A FABLE FOR LITERACY EDUCATORS

In 1901, Rudyard Kipling described his view about mastering a writing system when he wrote a fable called "How the alphabet was made". It is from this fable that we as educators, researchers and carers must learn.

He tells a story of Taffy and her Daddy. *'Once upon a most early time was a Neolithic man. He was a primitive and he lived cavily in a cave, and he wore very few clothes and he couldn't read and he couldn't write and he didn't want to.'* One day the man and his daughter went out fishing and Daddy broke his spear in the middle. He did not bring any more spears with him and they were miles and miles from home. Taffy volunteered to go home but Daddy thought it was too far and too dangerous. Taffy sat down while Daddy tried to mend his spear.

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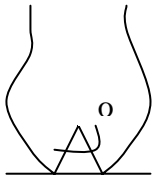
She said, "I say, Daddy it is an awful nuisance that you and I don't know how to write, isn't it? If we did we could send a message for the new spear."

Just then a stranger man came along the river and Taffy draws a picture and the stranger man is asked to get another spear by following the picture instructions. This does not go to plan and the whole clan attacks the kind stranger man with mud in his hair but a great learning occurs.

"Oh, Taffy you've hit upon a great invention and some day men will call it writing. At present it is only pictures and pictures are not always properly understood, but a time will come when we shall make letters and we shall always say exactly what we mean without any mistakes."

So the next week, Taffy and her Daddy were fishing and reminiscing about the poor stranger man. Taffy took a marrow bone and sat mousy quiet for ten minutes while her Daddy scratched on pieces of Birch-bark with a shark's tooth. Taffy said "Daddy I've thought of a surprise. You make a noise – any sort of noise."

"Ah! Will that do?"



"Yes, Daddy it reminds me when I jumped out of the dark and surprised you with that noise – same as I did in the beaver creek last winter. You look just like a carp fish with its mouth open. Lend me that Shark's tooth. I'm going to draw a carp-fish's mouth wide open." "That's not bad," said Daddy, "but you've forgotten the feeler that hangs across his mouth. Look here Taffy and he drew this."

"Now I'll copy it," said Taffy. "Will you understand this when you see it?" (*the 'A'*)

"Perfectly," said her Daddy. "I'll be quite as surprised when I see it anywhere, as if you had jumped out from behind a tree and said Ah!"

"Now make another noise..." And so Taffy and her daddy went on to make figures for all the sounds that they made with their mouth.

Rudyard Kipling recognised that the mouth was important in the construction of the letters of the alphabet. Speech was, in this situation converted into a visual code (the alphabet) by a young child (about four years old). To be specific, Taffy coded speech.

The significance of this fable should lead educators to begin the mastery of a writing system at a young age and it would impress upon educators that the mouth is a significant tool in connecting speech and letters. Coding should become a word of choice for educators of reading and writing.

But we can not base our teachings on a fable, so it is the task of this paper to prove these assumptions with evidence. By gathering information and analysing research on learning difficulties as well as using anecdotal evidence, it is possible to make assumptions about the mastery of a writing system and how to improve literacy levels and more importantly, when to begin.

LEARNING DIFFICULTIES IN LITERACY

To begin our discussion, research into dyslexia suggests that the mastery of a writing system is dependent upon acquiring an adequate phonological knowledge of the language.

"There is now a strong consensus that the central difficulty in dyslexia reflects a deficit with in the language system and more particularly, in a lower level component, phonology which has to do with the ability to access underlying sound

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structure of words.” (S. Shoywitz, 1998, Wagner and Torgeson, 1987 p.6 A report on Literacy Network and Numeracy Network Deliberations OECD Brockton MA, USA 2003 A. Kelly, George Mason University, USA)

“In young school age children a deficit in phonology represents the most reliable and specific correlate of dyslexia.” (Fletcher et al., 1994, Morris et al., 1998 p.6 A report on Literacy Network and Numeracy Network Deliberations OECD Brockton MA, USA 2003 A. Kelly, George Mason University, USA)

“The mastery of a writing system, which converts speech into a visual code, depends upon acquiring an adequate phonological knowledge of the language.” (Sebastian Galles p.3 A report on Literacy Network and Numeracy Network Deliberations OECD Brockton MA, USA 2003 A. Kelly, George Mason University, USA)

Of particular interest is this concept of phonological awareness and its degree of complexity.

The question of adequate phonology has also been recognized in the OECD paper 2003 OECD literacy review by Wise et al. “Perhaps we have not gone deep enough in our training of phonological skills.” (Wise et al., 2000) (p.50 A report on Literacy Network and Numeracy Network Deliberations OECD Brockton MA, USA 2003 A. Kelly, George Mason University, USA)

There is much research that investigates the absence of brain function and deficits of neural pathways with dyslexia.

“In dyslexic readers, a range of neurobiological investigations shows a failure of the left hemisphere posterior brain systems to function properly during reading.” (p.7 A report on Literacy Network and Numeracy Network Deliberations OECD Brockton MA, USA 2003 A. Kelly, George Mason University, USA)

“Dyslexia does not reflect a developmental lag but remains with the child for his lifetime.” (p.7 A report on Literacy Network and Numeracy Network Deliberations OECD Brockton MA, USA 2003 A. Kelly, George Mason University, USA)

This evidence suggests that the early development of neural pathways is significant to ‘dyslexia’.

“Evidence of a disruption in the normal reading pathways provides a neurobiological target for reading interventions.” (p.7 A report on Literacy Network and Numeracy Network Deliberations OECD Brockton MA, USA 2003 A. Kelly, George Mason University, USA)

This evidence has implications for research into how the information is stored effectively and consequently retrieved.

In looking for answers, researchers may consider that dyslexia is specific to languages with complex orthographies but this is not so.

“Early markers of dyslexia appear even for readers of shallow orthographies”. (p.12 A report on Literacy Network and Numeracy Network Deliberations OECD Brockton MA, USA 2003 A. Kelly, George Mason University, USA)

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Even some Finnish children have dyslexia and they have one of the highest literacy levels in the world.

The intention of presenting the above research outcomes is to provide a point of reference for future research into Kinephonics.

SIGNIFICANT UNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT LEARNING TO READ AND SPELL

BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

At this point it is important to present a summarized version of the information about the formation of the neurons in the brain.

“The brain is made up of neurons, or brain cells, which connect to one another through synapses. Synapses are physical gaps between neurons, like the gaps between the electrodes in spark plugs, through which nerve impulses travel.

Neurotransmitters carry signals between brain cells. They diffuse across the synapse and trigger the electrical activity that transmits information through the brain. The catch phrase in neuroscience is, ‘Cells that fire together, wire together’”. (Understanding brain development and early learning: Neurons and synapses By Bruce Murray, FACSNET Managing Editor)

“There may be 1,000 trillion synapses in the brain at 8 months.

After the first birthday, pruning occurs more quickly. By 10 years a child has nearly 500 trillion synapses, which is the same as the average adult. Pruning occurs for about 12 years but the brain maintains flexibility for future learning.

Early experiences, both positive and negative, have a dramatic effect on this formation of synapses. The brain operates on the "use it or lose it" principle. Only those connections and pathways that are frequently used are retained.

It is from early infancy to early childhood that these vital connections are made permanent. As we mature, the brain physically changes due to outside experiences. The first three years see the most rapid changes of all of life due to the bombardment of experience (everything is new!). At this time, the brain is most flexible and prepared to learn.” (Early Brain Development: What parents and caregivers need to know! by Phyllis Porter, M.A)

Therefore, early childhood is an optimal time for learning about the complex nature of sound.

THE MEMORY

The learning process is transferring information from short term to long term memory and is a physiological process.

Craik and Lockhart (1972) believed that it is the depth of processing which determines whether information is stored over a long rather than a short period. A large number of studies support the depth of processing conclusion.

Other studies of elaborative processing show benefits of connecting the items to be remembered to other related information (e.g., elaborating on sentences to be remembered, or rhyming.)

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Therefore, the processing of the complex nature of sound at a deeper level using visual, auditory and kinesthetic modalities would be beneficial.

MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES

Phonological knowledge is adequate if an individual child is able to retrieve the phonological knowledge from their memory and transfer it to a letter or combination of letters or words. Therefore phonological knowledge is dependent on the learner.

From an early age, the child has an individual ability, specific to their genes to gain knowledge and make their own neural pathways. The learner forms understandings from experiences and 'files' them into their memory ready for retrieval.

Gardner describes learners by describing perceptual modalities. "Perceptual modalities define biologically based reactions to our physical environment and represent the way we most efficiently adopt data." (Learning Styles, learningactivity.com, The Ageless Learner, 2005 Gardner's work on Multiple Intelligences (1993)) These biologically based reactions include the use of visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile senses amongst others. He explains that educators should ensure programs strike all physiologic levels to be successful in the achievement of a single learning goal.

At this point, we do not have the tools to predict how each child learns at the age of 3 and 4 years old, and it would be extremely time-consuming. However, what is important is that educators understand the importance of making provision for all types of learners to gain information and file it into their memories and make their own neural pathways.

Therefore, in order to provide adequate phonological knowledge, we must attempt to strike all learning modalities.

It is the assumption of this paper that in order to provide for adequate phonological knowledge, the kinesthetic learning modality must be given attention as well as visual and auditory modalities.

There is evidence of the dyslexic children using both the visual and kinesthetic modality as a preference in their learning.

LEARNING AND THE BRAIN

"One of the most basic kinds of change in our brains is the change that builds on what we already have – our neurological gifts." (James E. Zull, *The Art of Changing the Brain*, 2002)

Zull recognises how neural pathways are linked to learning and when to begin learning.

Zull describes: "The knowledge in our mind consists of neuronal networks in our brains, so if that knowledge is to grow, the neuronal networks must physically change. This is the change that a teacher wants to create. It is a change in connections. In neuroscience terms, changing connections means changing synapses." (p.112, James E. Zull, *The Art of Changing the Brain*, 2002)

"According to our current model of the connection between brain function, human learning, and education, we believe that education can engage the learner's brain to the fullest extent when students follow a cycle of concrete experience with their

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subject, reflection on their experience and connecting it to their prior knowledge, generation of their own abstract hypotheses about their experience and testing their hypotheses through action, which produces a new sensory (concrete) experience." (James Zull, 2002)

From this evidence, the assumption is that learning to read begins from a child's speech. We must therefore extend this pathway. If speech is the starting point, then connections should be made between speech and the letters of the alphabet. The connections in learning that should take place are firstly, between speech and the recognition of the mouth movements and secondly, between the mouth movements and the letters of the alphabet. The recognition of the mouth movements are made by using a mirror or reflective surface. Kinephonics makes these connections possible.

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Kinephonics is a method of learning to articulate, read and spell based on the recognition of the motion of the mouth. copyright © Anna Gill, 2005.

Kinephonics, it would seem, can provide the 'adequate phonology' for the mastery of a writing system.

Kinephonics introduces the mouth as the source of kinesthetic modality and consequently provides a comprehensive strike on learning.

Many reading schemes would argue that they achieve the kinesthetic aspect of learning to read by dancing to rhymes or writing the words but the kinesthetic mode can be achieved more succinctly by the recognition of the movement of the mouth and subsequently, the feeling of the mouth movement.

Kinephonics incorporates visual, auditory and kinesthetic awareness of the representation of the letter at the same time on the same 'page'. Visual with a picture and the representation of the letter; auditory with the sound of the letter; and kinesthetic with the recognition of the mouth movement of the sound using a mirror. The kinesthetic modality becomes the tactile modality with repetition.

Kinephonics also incorporates the organisation of the presentation of the new knowledge. Pictures, reflective surfaces and words are organised so that connections in learning can occur.

This organisation is seen in the first publication using Kinephonics which has been developed specifically for Early Learning, Ages 2-6. The book is called 'Look at my Mouth'. Each page mimics the way the brain learns. 'Look at the beautiful... "butterfly".' 'What a dirty..... "dog".' Connections are made between the previous knowledge and the new knowledge. Starting with speech and moving to the new knowledge, the word. The picture and the word are connected by a mirror. Connections can be made between the previous knowledge and the new knowledge and consequently, learning can take place.

Therefore, due to the conclusions of the research into brain physiology and learning, success in learning the sounds of the alphabet is anticipated when a person uses Kinephonics.

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EARLY RESEARCH USING 'LOOK AT MY MOUTH' BY ANNA GILL

In the research, children were chosen who were having problems learning to read, in their first year of school. If Kinephonics can be used as a learning support technique then it would be beneficial for all children to experience Kinephonics at a young age.

The researcher was not given any specific background to these children. However, after seeing them in the first session, it was realised that many of them had 'auditory processing' difficulties. These difficulties can be related to dyslexia. "In young school age children a deficit in phonology represents the most reliable and specific correlate of dyslexia." (S. Shoywitz, 1998, Wagner and Torgeson, 1987) In the researcher's view these difficulties are described as problems of 'adequate phonology'.

It is the researcher's view that having 'auditory processing difficulties' means that a child is not as mature in this mode of learning. Rather, they are mature in other areas of learning. For children with dyslexia, the preferred processing skills are kinesthetic and visual. At this stage (Kindergarten), it is important for the child to learn to read using their best processing skills and therefore maintain confidence among class members.

Using 'Look at my Mouth' children were provided with the initial experiences (visual, auditory, kinesthetic) of the sounds of the alphabet. The children's teacher said that they knew the sounds of the alphabet but after reading 'Look at my Mouth', it was found that many of the children did not recognise that the mouth was forming the sounds of the letters. Therefore, the children did not have the adequate phonology or kinesthetic awareness needed for the act of reading and subsequently were not using their preferred processing skill. After four sessions with 'Look at my Mouth', the children moved through Kinephonic stages towards the attainment of blending.

KINEPHONIC STAGES FOR BEGINNING READING

Stage 1: To use the picture and word cues to complete the sentence

Stage 2: To look at the mouth movements in the mirror

Stage 3: To point to the word that represents the picture

Stage 4: Recognition of the mouth movement with that word

Stage 5: Recognition of the mouth movement with the high-lighted letter

Stage 6a: Familiarity with the mouth movements being connected to the letter.

Stage 6b: Use the word 'sound'. Connect the sound with the letter.

Stage 6c: Introduce the name of the letter with the 'sound' of the letter (letter-sound correspondence)

Stage 7: Letters out of context. (without book) One letter (Reading one letter). Ask child to 'do' the letter. If they can not remember, remind them of the 'Look at my Mouth' page

Stage 8: Letters out of context. (without book) Two/three letters (Reading 2/3 letters). Ask child to 'do' the letters one after another. If the child has problems blending, focus on one sense – the mouth movement. "No-noise blending!" Do the mouth movements - no sound and eyes closed.

The children were asked to participate in blending of sounds out of the context of the book. It was at this point that the knowledge gained from 'Look at my Mouth' was used. Specific words were used by the researcher to stimulate the

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blending of sounds. The children were asked to 'do' the letters (rather than 'sound out' the letters) thus stimulating the kinesthetic modality in the memory and the results were the movements of the mouth!

The words 'sound out' present confusion for these learners as they do not present the kinesthetic mode to the task of sounding out. 'Sound out' is not a verb, rather it presents to the child words which mean 'noise which you can hear'. In the case of Kinephonics, the kinesthetic aspect can be described as 'doing' the letters. The 'doing' of the letters can only be achieved if the child has a thorough knowledge of the complex nature of 'sound' - a sound being visual, auditory and kinesthetic by nature.

When children had difficulty remembering the mouth movement, they were reminded of the visual picture relating to the letter. It was the combination of visual and kinesthetic modalities which has helped these children towards the attainment of reading. The children showed general improvement in blending/reading words out of the context of the book over the four sessions.

From this research, it can be concluded that Kinephonics provides an alternative theory for learning support. Therefore, it must be recognized that as Kinephonics is so accessible for children from three years old, then it would be of benefit to introduce Kinephonics at a young age for their future benefit.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Another area of interest was that of the children's organisational difficulties. Some of these children needed to be guided from the beginning to the end of the page/book/word. 'Look at my Mouth' helped to guide the children through the learning process. This is another area significant for further research.

The development of early vowel sound knowledge using Kinephonics as compared to the more traditional phonics would be an interesting research comparison. Kinephonics would be of benefit for children as the differences in mouth shape are substantially more significant than the auditory differences. Spelling would be used as a tool for research as it is predicted that the children with Kinephonic experience would always remember to write the middle vowel sound of the word. They would write 'c-a-t' rather than 'c-t' which is very common for early spellers.

Obviously, this paper introduces the reader to the theory of Kinephonics. It is predicted that there will be on-going research to show the benefits of Kinephonics.

BENEFITS FOR TEACHERS

'Look at my Mouth' can be used as an assessment tool for reading readiness as well as a learning tool to develop a child's understanding of the complex nature of sound.

Teachers learn about how children learn to read by watching a child using 'Look at my Mouth' and using the Kinephonic Stages.

Through Kinephonics, children are developing their strategies for spelling.

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KINEPHONICS AND EARLY CHILDHOOD

There are many reasons why preschool is the best time to start work in Kinephonics.

Kinephonics adds to the many literacy skills already being taught at preschool. (such as talking and listening, singing, stories, fine motor-skills, simple recognition of letters and numbers)

Kinephonics allows for an interactive child.

Kinephonics allows children to explore literacy using visual, auditory and kinesthetic learning.

Kinephonics allows a child to explore literacy without 'getting it wrong'.

Kinephonics provides for the egocentricity of the child at this age using the mirror.

Kinephonics allows the child to have a complete understanding of sounds before he/she moves to the more traditional methods of learning to read and spell. If the knowledge of the complex nature of sound is experienced at an early age while the neurons are developing, then this will provide for ease of retrieval.

Kinephonics allows a child to meet their own expectations more successfully, of learning to read in the first year of school – so there is less chance of learning difficulties/behavioural problems.

BENEFITS FOR ECONOMIES

Of particular issue to many nations across the world is the improvement of literacy rates within the restrictions of a budget. I am advocating that Kinephonics be disseminated across the world for the understanding of the complex nature of sound. The nature of the first concept/book allows the concept to be interwoven with other reading schemes for a stronger awareness of 'sound'.

'Look at my Mouth' is the first publication using Kinephonics. 'Look at my Mouth' is a cheap resource able to be reproduced for many different markets. In order to understand the magnitude of the influence that 'Look at my Mouth' has over a child, it must be said that no paper can explain nearly as well as watching a child reading and interacting with a copy of the book.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The effectiveness of 'Look at my Mouth' (Kinephonics) has also been acknowledged by academics, children and practitioners.

"Alphabet books are a crucial resource for young children negotiating initial reading experiences and this one has a great deal to offer in terms of its innovative approach – and just so much fun for young children reading with adults or older children as mentors." Unsworth, 2005 School of Education, University of New England, Australia.

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“It certainly offers an innovative, entertaining, and attractive way to demonstrate to young children that words are composed of individual sounds, which is an important thing to understand when learning to read.” McArthur and Coltheart, 2005 Macquarie Centre for Cognitive Science, Macquarie University, Australia

“It is just great!! I love it!! It really is so simple, obvious, needed, attractive, precise, just right, etc. etc. You have captured this concept to a tee. The illustrations are great and I like the use of all of them front and back. I especially like your introduction of each word with a simple sentence and including some good adjectives.” Helen Grant, Teacher 40 years, 2005

A six year old boy, whom I have been working with in spelling and writing was elated when he wrote a word down because, he said, “The mirror tells me the sounds!”

This story of a two year old boy who was attending Speech Therapy because he was not saying any single words was related to me at the Speech Pathology Australia conference. Paula, the Speech Therapist gave him a copy of ‘Look at my Mouth’. He looked at himself in the mirror on the front of the book. He liked the look of himself! He opened the book and said every single word in the book! Paula was overwhelmed and so too was his mother! He had never done anything like this before!

This resource is of benefit for all children at what ever developmental level they are at (from two years on). ‘Look at my Mouth’ is a speech awareness book, a speech therapy book and an alphabet book. I am happy that ‘Look at my Mouth’ will benefit children in early childhood and allow them to be well prepared for their future learning.” Randwick Preschool, Kindergarten Union.

I am always amazed by the stories and humbled when I realise that ‘Look at my Mouth’ is influencing children and adults in more ways than I had ever expected.

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Correspondence about this paper should be emailed to:

Anna Gill

info@lookatmymouth.com

website address: www.lookatmymouth.com