

Fantastic New Resources from THRASS UK Set to Make Major Contribution to Two New UK Government Programmes

THRASS UK has earned a reputation for producing highly successful innovative resources for helping children to read and spell, and it has just announced the launch of a new set of resources that, in addition to being fantastic resources in their own right, look set to make a major contribution to the effectiveness of two new UK Government programmes. The THRASS Family SING-A-LONG Resources, to be launched at the end of January, will have the potential to make a major contribution to the effectiveness of the Government's 2008 National Year of Reading and also to that of 'Sing Up', the new Government-sponsored singing programme for primary school children.

"The 2008 National Year of Reading will create a powerful focus of opportunities and activities, so that children, families and adult learners understand the benefits that reading for pleasure and purpose can bring to change their lives." This is the vision of Ed Balls, Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, for the 2008 National Year of Reading, during which he wants every parent to make the effort to hear their children read regularly and businesses to encourage staff to volunteer to hear schoolchildren read, in order to help build a more skilled national workforce.

However, many parents and adult volunteers are not confident with identifying the one-, two- and three-letter spelling choices in English words and saying the sounds that they represent. Parents need to understand and use four 'searchlights' for reading with their children: a 'Word Recognition Searchlight', a 'Phonics Searchlight', a 'Context Searchlight' and a 'Grammar Searchlight', as set out in the National Literacy Strategy that the UK Government abandoned in 2005. The Government's new synthetic phonics programme, 'Letters and Sounds', focuses on the 'Phonics Searchlight', an approach which is inadequate for both parents and young children.

THRASS UK has already produced many resources (an extensive picture-based website, training courses, interactive Calendar Charts and the groundbreaking Phoneme Machine software) to make it easier for parents to help their children to read, as part of its widely-acclaimed THRASS (Teaching Handwriting Reading And Spelling Skills) phonics programme. Now, mindful of the lack of confidence of many parents, and also of many teachers and teaching assistants, British educational psychologist, Alan Davies, an expert in synthetic phonics who has pioneered the THRASS programme, has developed the THRASS Family SING-A-LONG Resources. The Resources will help parents and others understand synthetic phonics alongside the three other 'searchlights' and make it much easier for children and adults to master the sounds and spelling choices of English.

The THRASS Family SING-A-LONG Resources, which will comprise a 96-page hard-back book, an interactive book, an audio CD and a colouring book, will use 44 songs that parents and others can sing with children to explain the 44 sounds and 120 main spelling choices of English. And the Resources will have a truly universal appeal, as they have been developed with the help of experts from around the world: a music specialist in South Africa, an artist in Australia, and a computer programmer and Alan's wife, an experienced teacher and teacher-trainer, in the UK.

But it isn't just to the effectiveness of the 2008 National Year of Reading that the THRASS Family SING-A-LONG Resources will make such a valuable contribution. They will also contribute to the effectiveness of 'Sing Up', the new Government-sponsored singing programme for primary school children that is aiming to make

singing in primary schools, the home and the wider community central to young children's lives. Singing can benefit children in many different ways and there are many reasons why singing is such a great activity for them. Group singing is particularly effective for increasing children's social skills, singing is good for their health and for their emotional well-being, and it can also increase their confidence and improve their communication skills. But perhaps the most important benefit is that singing has been shown to accelerate learning and improve the memory, one of Alan Davies' main reasons for developing the SING-A-LONG Resources.

2007 was extremely successful for THRASS UK, with the highlight of the year the corporate sponsorship of the THRASS phonics programme by Absa Bank, a member of the Barclays Group, in South Africa through the THRASS Absa TalkTogether Literacy Project launched in July, and 2008 looks set to be even more successful. Absa Bank and Pritt are to be the founding principal sponsors of the THRASS SING-A-LONG project in South Africa and major construction company, Murray & Roberts, is set to become an associate sponsor of SING-A-LONG in early childhood development centres in Soweto and elsewhere. The THRASS Absa TalkTogether team will also be continuing discussions with Intel about incorporating the SING-A-LONG Interactive Book and the Phoneme Machine software, which Intel has assessed as excellent, into its Classmate PCs and 'Skool' global programme for schools.

The new THRASS Family SING-A-LONG Resources will provide an excellent opportunity for parents, teachers and children to make an early start to focus on reading and at the same time make singing central to young children's lives. The Resources certainly look set to make a major contribution to the effectiveness of both UK Government programmes, as well as being enormously successful in their own right.

The THRASS picture-based training website with access to a wide range of resources and support materials, and extensive evidence of the widespread success of THRASS is at www.thrass.co.uk

For more information about the 2008 National Year of Reading, visit www.yearofreading.org.uk.

For more information about 'Sing Up', visit www.singup.org.

For more information about the THRASS Absa TalkTogether Project, visit www.talktogether.co.za and www.thrass.co.uk/talktogether.htm

For details of THRASS Professional Development Courses that are held regularly in the UK, Europe, West and Southern Africa and elsewhere, visit www.thrass.co.uk/courses.htm

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