

Title:

Old is new again in teaching reading

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HEAD OF THE CLASS with MARGARET LINLEY

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Old is new again in teaching reading

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RESCUING a child from reading failure is a hugely rewarding experience, says Fay Tran, retired teacher and author of *Teaching Kids to Read*.

With 40 years of experience under her belt, the last 25 of those at Geelong Grammar, Mrs Tran has seen the tide turn away from teaching spelling rules and phonics and then return.

But for the Torquay woman, success has always been about teaching the conventions of language.

"In the mid 1980s phonics was very unpopular," she said. "You were told you were old-fashioned if you focused on phonics."

Mrs Tran stood her ground and continued to teach phonics and spelling rules and, in her role as learning support teacher, provided tuition to small groups and in one-on-one situations. The stories of these children pepper the book and enable its target audience of parents to identify if their own children have a reading problem.

"If you read the stories you will at least pick up if your child has a problem or not," she said. "If there is a problem the first step is to talk to the child's teacher. If you don't get any satisfaction there, then see a psychologist or private tutor who will diagnose what the problem is."

Her book is complex, covering a lot of issues and would require some considerable effort from a parent to digest and then decide on a course of action for their child with a reading problem.

But then, she said, it is not the parent's role to teach their child to read.

"You notice the big fuss about NAPLAN (compulsory literacy and reading tests) with schools often blaming parents and the social situation for their (child's) lack of reading skills," she said. "It is the school's responsibility to teach the child to read and write, regardless of their home background."

Mrs Tran said she was delighted to see phonics being reinstated in next year's national curriculum approach.

Teaching Kids to Read by Fay Tran is published by Wilkins Farago.

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