

Title: Teaching Kids to Read: Basic skills for Australian and New Zealand parents and teachers

Author: Fay Tran

Year of Publication: 2010

Place of Publication: Australia

ISBN: 9780980607055(pbk.) 9780980607062(pdf)

Publisher: Wilkins Farago Pty Ltd

Price: \$29.99

Description

The soft-covered book is 176 pages and measures 23 cm x 15.5 cm. The layout is attractive and simple. Blue type is used for case studies and to highlight text. Peter Westwood has written the foreword. After the Glossary, which gives the definition of some 26 technical terms used in the book, there is an introduction on the learning journey which explains phonics and the new National Curriculum, followed by fifteen chapters which cover Developing early language and literacy, Developing phonemic awareness and early phonic skills, Diagnosing learning difficulties, Understanding specific learning difficulties, Understanding difficulties with short-term auditory memory, Difficulties arising at school, Reading comprehension strategies, ADHD, To repeat or not to repeat (a grade), Homework, The search for new teaching techniques, Mathematics, Using computer programs to assist in learning, Explanations explaining how a little help can go a long way, and Reflections and convictions. Following these chapters are Essential Word Reading Lists which are designed to help children develop rapid word-identification skills, Essential Spelling Lists, designed to be used as a spelling program, Phonograms, References and Where to go for help.

Appraisal

Fay Tran is a specialist literacy teacher with over 25 years' experience in helping children with learning difficulties, particularly at Geelong Grammar School. She holds a Bachelor of Education from Deakin University and a Bachelor of Special Education from Flinders University and is a member of LDA and SPELD. To read this book is like sitting down in the staff room and having a chat with an essentially humble person who describes herself as a learning support teacher. She likens the learning process to embarking on a journey to a fairly vague destination, by means of a poorly mapped road. She sees a three-way relationship between the child, the school and the home as essential for success. Her role is to monitor the progress of all the travellers along this learning journey, to make sure they are well-equipped and to guide them back to the correct path should they make a wrong turn or fall behind. We, as readers, are taken along that path as Fay shares the fruits of her lifetime's passion for literacy. Artfully written, her approach is never pontifical and always informal and chatty. Yet she has never 'dumbed down' what she has to say. She has strong views. 'Children who are encouraged to read by noticing one or two letters of a word and then guessing the whole word from the context or accompanying illustration, or who rely on visual memory to remember whole words, are being set along a path that is unlikely to lead them to literacy success,' she says, explaining that 'research has shown conclusively that children who are

taught to use word-analysis and synthetic skills, particularly phonics, as their primary reading strategy are at least directed along the correct path to literacy.'

What I found made Fay's book eminently readable was the frequent use of case studies written in diary form. 'Barry becomes upset whenever he is asked to read even the easiest book, so I suggested that his parents keep reading to him and refrain from asking him to read at all, at least for the time being. Reading to children from babyhood is probably the most valuable contribution parents can make to their children's reading development, and it should not stop when a child starts to read, even when there is no learning difficulty involved.' Then there is Holly. 'She is reading at a level well below the average for her age, and her spelling is not too good, either. I was surprised to note that Holly's school reports from her previous school gave no indication of difficulties.' She made rapid progress partly as a result of structured teaching both in the classroom and Learning Support systems and because of her parent's involvement. Other cases abound, including Stephen who has a history of hearing impairment and delayed language, and Peter who suffers 'from not just ADHD,' and we accompany Fay as she puzzles over the problems and works out what to do.

The sort of wisdom that only comes from years of working at the coalface is one of the most attractive features of the book. Happily, there is a chapter on mathematics and some sound advice on using computer programs to assist learning. Nothing concerned with good teaching is considered too trivial to mention, so that we are shown precisely (and I mean precisely) how to hear a child read and how to teach him or her to spell.

This refreshing book is an excellent resource to teachers and parents. It will go a long way to dealing with what are at present our unreasonably high levels of illiteracy.

Dick Weigall OAM