

## The Edutainer – connecting the art and science of teaching

Brad Johnson and Tammy Maxon McElroy  
Rowman and Littlefield Education  
ISBN 978-1-60709-613-9  
RR \$40

Preparation, delivery, performance: the similarities between education and entertainment are striking. And as attention spans continue to get shorter, if teachers are to compete for students' attention the similarities will only need to become more pronounced; you have to be more than a teacher, more an edutainer.

Brad Johnson and Tammy Maxon McElroy pin down the edutainer approach in their book *The Edutainer – connecting the art and science of teaching*.

Much of the blame lies with the media. The authors write; "When a child is watching a program that he or she is not interested in the child can simply change the channel. Another problem with television is that an issue is posed and solved in a neatly packaged thirty-minute segment."

We're also busily rearing a generation that's ambitious and self-centred and increasingly a generation that's disconnected from a wider community because of isolating entertainments like video games and, often, paranoid parents.

So, under threat of being turned off in favour of something more interesting, the pressure is on for teachers to deliver the curriculum in a slick, polished way.

The authors maintain that the most successful teachers combine elements of both craft and art. Planning, delivery of instruction and assessment underpin the teacher's ability to transport and fire their students' creativity and enthusiasm.

Successful teachers must be visionaries. They understand that a change in culture requires a change in methods and presentation and make their material relevant to present culture. They also have self-confidence, the alternative being ending up with stage fright and being unable to perform.

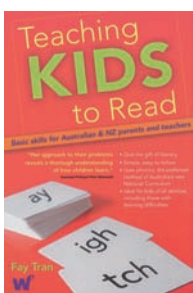
Material is planned and organised before they get on "stage" and the teacher has to deliver a performance that is relatable to the audience or risk being booted.

Throughout, the authors draw heavily on the theatrical metaphor, even structuring the book in Acts One through Three: vision, rehearsal and performance. But it isn't as twee as it sounds, successfully involving elements of the theatre has the power to create a classroom environment where creativity and imagination can flourish, a challenge when teachers are

being encouraged to narrow their focus and deliver test results.

"They offer hope, inspiration and concrete proposals about how to make the classroom come alive while remaining responsive to the demands of rigor and responsibility," writes Prof Joe A Richardson in the preface.

*The Edutainer* is light on the jargon and organised into concise vignettes, further its linear organisation makes it easy to reference and therefore useful when planning lessons.



## Teaching kids to read

Fay Tran  
Wilkins Farago  
ISBN 978-0-9806070-5-5  
RR \$30

It's hard to over emphasise the importance of reading, it underpins just about everything. Unfortunately, too many students lag in reading skills. The solution? Get them early.

In her book *Teaching Kids to Read*, Fay Tran gives us an advocacy of and a succinct grounding in the application of phonics – connecting letters to sounds – an approach that had, for a while, fallen out of vogue.

Kids can encounter difficulty in reading for many reasons. Most commonly an inability to read is related to problems with short-term auditory memory, speed of processing words, language delay and attention problems, or a combination thereof.

But Tran, ever positive, says that most of these difficulties can be overcome with good teaching.

She writes "All that is needed is systematic, direct instruction of the required skills, particularly phonics, in the classroom, ample opportunity and encouragement to the developing skills in reading and writing activities and individual support in the early years for those who have a special difficulty."

In 15 short and sweet chapters, Tran takes us through the whole issue of reading difficulties, using case studies to illustrate the progress that can be achieved with phonics.

Take Henry, who suffered from a reverse stammer, fudging words at their end rather than beginning. He was also struggling to read. Tran took the time to diagnose his problem, which revealed that it wasn't that he lacked smarts, in fact he scored highly in visual perception tests, but had difficulty in deciphering shapes that had changed their order.

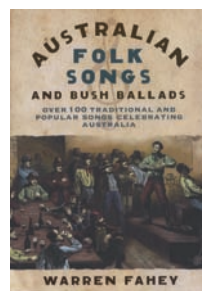
Put on the program – Tran details the exact approach, timeframes and learning tasks – Henry's improvement was steady, the transformation from struggling reader to competent student complete within a year.

Tran has been given hope by the inclusion of the phonic approach in the new national curriculum. In kindergarten, letter/sound relation is to be introduced with the children expected to read and write consonant-vowel-consonant words and some high frequency words and the phonics approach built upon in subsequent primary years.

Tran expects that "as the teaching of phonics and spelling rules is resumed in classroom after an absence of many years, there should be a noticeable reduction in the numbers of children struggling to acquire basic literacy."

The book's strength lies not in its spruiking of phonics but in the addressing of the entire literacy problem, ways forward and in its encouragement of deeper investigation and care on a kid-by-kid basis.

Moreover, Tran's is a message of sensitivity and positivity, which also can never be over emphasised.



## Australian Folk Songs and Bush Ballads

Warren Fahey  
ABC Books  
ISBN 978-0-7333288-2-4  
RR \$39.99

Occasionally, a book comes along that you just have to have; *Australian Folk Songs and Bush Ballads* by Warren Fahey is one.

The author has been collecting, recording, writing about and singing Australian folk songs for over 40 years and this book is clearly a labour of love.

He has assembled a collection of 100 ballads, with the music for each. Most are accompanied by explanatory notes and there are many delightful cartoons, drawings and photographs.

If you are looking for a song about the sea... turn to the Australian Maritime Collection on page 86; for Struggle and Strife, dip into Solidarity Forever on page 182; or find what the Wild Colonials got up to on page 36.

Is this a book for history teachers? Or music teachers? It's going to be loved and maybe squabbled over by both, so the school's librarian will need to have at least two copies on the shelf.

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