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 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.

In his 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.

NOTICES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

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