

Know Better Do Better: Foundations - Study Guide Questions

Chapter one:

1. What exactly are alphabetic knowledge and letter recognition? Capture your own working definitions and check them against those offered in the chapter.
2. Why is knowing the names of letters of the alphabet helpful and important?
3. What are some fun and common ways to improve alphabetic knowledge?
4. What does rapid naming have to do with letter recognition?
5. Many millennials have reported they have trouble reading cursive writing because they were never taught how to write it. How does this connect to troubles caused by lack of letter recognition in reading?

Chapter two:

1. Name some things Hani's teachers did for her that struck you as most effective.
2. What ingredients constitute print concepts?
3. Why do you think print concepts can sometimes be overlooked by early grade teachers?
4. Why is it valuable to have even pre-literate children create their own "books"?

Chapter three

1. There is some disagreement about whether or not early grade teachers should spend some time on getting children to hear random sounds (developing phonological awareness) vs. immediately focusing on letter sounds and developing phonemic awareness. What is your own position on this? Why?
2. Why did we go through such an elaborate exploration of what a word is and what sentences do at the Family Academy even early in kindergarten? What do you think of all that?
3. Using two circles as your images, make or describe a picture of the relationship between phonemic and phonological awareness. Is one circle bigger? Explain your design.
4. Explain why phonemic awareness activities and games could be done with children 'in the dark'.

5. Discuss the critical role rhyming (hearing and being able to make rhymes) plays in children learning to read.
6. Talk about ways you can use children's abilities in one of the games in this chapter to diagnose how skilled they are in phonemic awareness.
7. Why does phonemic awareness ability predict student success in beginning reading so well?

Chapter four

1. English is often referred to as an "opaque" language as compared to say, Spanish. How is Marvin's refusal to believe vowels could stand for multiple sounds demonstrate that just might be the case?
2. Were you taught or actively teaching during the Whole Language era? If so, what remembrances or feelings do you have about it? If not, what is your impression of it now?
3. In your own work with little children, how sophisticated and intellectual have you found them to be? Are you frequently surprised? Have you ever found you've underestimated their intellect?
4. The National Reading Panel named the need for balance when designing a complete research-based instructional approach to teaching reading. How did this morph into Balanced Literacy?
5. What's the difference between synthetic and analytic phonics? Which do you feel you have more familiarity with?
6. Explain why "systematic" is key in young readers mastering phonics, and far more important than whether phonics is approached synthetically or analytically.
7. Conduct an inventory of your own thoughts, attitudes and feelings toward controlled readers for novice readers. Do you consider both leveled and decodable readers to be controlled and artificial, or only one type or the other?

Chapter five:

1. Why are scope and sequence rightfully so linked in most teachers' minds to what it means to have a systematic phonics program?
2. What are the benefits of teaching new phonic patterns in isolation? Why does it cause so much controversy? What is your own position on the value (or not) of this practice?
3. The chapter discusses the common pitfall of confusing student practice opportunities as busy work where teachers could have students on auto-pilot and put their attention elsewhere. Why do teachers still have to actively engage even when students are practicing something new they're learning?
4. It surprised us to learn that there is no concise research on how long novice readers should stay reading books or passages that are largely decodable for them (that give them a chance to practice the phonics patterns they've been introduced to). What is your take on this question? How long do you believe children benefit from reading decodable (to them) readers as opposed to books where there are many unknown patterns?
5. We have seen many instances when children are given a chance to read whatever they want and the more novice readers return over and over to their decodable readers. Why do you think this happens, and how might it connect to the vagueness and variability of the research findings we referenced in the question just above?
6. What is your experience with young children and repetition? Do you agree with the conclusion in this chapter that children appreciate and even enjoy repetition?

Chapter six:

1. What is the connection between public speaking and reading fluency?
2. Do you incorporate public speaking opportunities adequately in your own work with children? If so, describe how you do it, and if not, discuss some ways you could incorporate more.
3. What are the three aspects of reading fluency?
4. Explain how prosody, or expressiveness can be a useful way to diagnose how well a student is comprehending what she's reading.

5. Why is speed (increasing words correct per minute) a dangerous goal in teaching students how to read well?
6. When the chapter discusses making sure students are “reading” punctuation, what does that mean to you?
7. Why is choral reading so effective?

Chapter seven:

1. At the Family Academy Middle School, we were very direct and honest about naming students reading issues and stating they were not connected to intelligence. What do you think about this approach? Have you ever done anything like that with students you’ve worked with who had significant gaps in their foundational skills knowledge?
2. This chapter spends a lot of time on curing dysfluency and ensuring every student can read grade level text with fluency. We think of this as the ‘low hanging’ fruit in improving reading for students far behind. Yet reading fluency rarely gets the recognition it deserves. Why do you think this is so and what is your own position on its importance?
3. Why is it so important to get parent buy-in when working with older students who are struggling to read comfortably?
4. We discuss students we’ve known, students we called Reggie and Robert, those were not their real names. What ‘Reggies’ or ‘Roberts’ do you have in your past or present? Do you know what, specifically, they’re struggling with? How does it manifest itself in their feelings about school, about themselves, their hopes and plans for their future? If your student is from past years, do you know what she or he is up to now?
5. Why is it so important to use grade level text with students who aren’t reading on grade level?
6. Could the culture of your school accommodate a school wide effort such as the partnered fluency project? If not, what would have to change to make something like this work in your setting? Do you think it could?
7. How do you feel about the competitive edge we suggest as options for some of the games we introduce in the second part of the chapter? How do you think your students, especially early adolescents would react to an element of competition in their work?

