

Self-knowledge As A Key Concept In Teaching Reading

By Robyn Whyte This article is part of a four part series that discusses how to teach reading and the specialized approach needed within the guided reading philosophy. Simply put, guided reading has many aspects but is a driving philosophy about how to teach children to read. Adopted in most parts of the developed world (Canada, U.S. (midwest), England, New Zealand and Australia, guided reading is now one of the most utilized ways to teach reading. What self-knowledge? When a child enters the classroom, reading is one of the first things that becomes important. Sure, there is learning of letters, manners and routine but reading is at the forefront of most efforts in the primary classroom. In Kindergarten, a child often sits in circles and joins in on discussions about things they know about. Even in early teaching then, self-knowledge is a critical factor in learning success. If a teacher asks a question about who knows what about horses and a little boy raises his hand, she presumes he will be able to add something to the discussion. These can be anecdotal accounts of horses. It could be as easy as the fact that he knew someone who owned a horse. Or the child could bring to the circle information about taking care of horses or where to find them. Without this self-knowledge, circle time would be a snooze fest even in Kindergarten. What does self-knowledge have to do with learning to read? Once we get to the reading stage, teachers have a huge job ahead of them. Reading requires a sustained amount of years in large time blocks for reading to take root. If teachers don't have self-knowledge, children can easily become statistics of illiteracy. If we were to adopt the post modern approach of the 1950's, we would believe that children are blank slates to be written on. Pour the knowledge in. That's right. We would imagine that at the age of five and six, these children don't have enough life experience to be valued for their self-knowledge or in other terms, their attainment of basic knowledge about themselves and the world around them. But this is 2007 and we rarely hear teachers speak about children as though they are blank slates but rather quick as whips or smarter than children should be. In fact, teachers realize from recent studies that only 15 percent of a child's influence comes from their school and teachers, leaving a whopping 85 percent elsewhere. So to acknowledge a child's self-knowledge would be the wisest thing to do rather than eliminating this as part of the approach in guided reading. In other words, bring a child's self-knowledge into the classroom and gain potentially 85 percent of that child's other world too. Where does guided reading appeal to self-knowledge? In guided reading, you will find the appeal to self-knowledge in lesson plans that encourage discussion, prediction and astute observation about pictures and text long before the story is read. The pre-reading section of most lesson plans is the appeal to self-knowledge. So imagine, you as a teacher or parent is about to start a fantastic guided reading story. Great. Start right there with just acknowledging a few new words and you may have lost half your audience. Snooze fest. Instead, follow the simple directions in a lesson plan about bringing a topic of interest to the forefront and inviting self-knowledge to the circle and you're on the right track. Example: A teacher in a grade one classroom is about to introduce a book about rainy days. Everybody has their own hand held copy. Everybody is eager to look inside. Still, a child could very well be disappointed at this point when the excitement of flipping the book open occurs. But imagine asking a few open ended questions? 1. Has anybody ever been stuck outside in the rain? 2. When did this happen? 3. What does it feel like to be stuck in the rain? 4. What would you do if you were stuck out in the rain? 5. Has anybody had a friend or mom or dad stuck out in the rain with them? 6. Look at the cover of this book, can you imagine what is going to happen? 7. Great, let's get started. This discussion can take all of ten minutes but ensure rapt attention throughout the teaching of this book. It could even encourage a child who doesn't get reading as fast as other children to keep at it and work on it at home. Bring in self-knowledge and exceed the borders of your classrooms in a few easy questions. Push student self-knowledge to the limit and encourage sharing. This is why guided reading as a philosophy acknowledges the self-knowledge of children and why it has a firm place in the guided reading circle.

About the Author

Robyn Whyte is the CEO of Stargazer Press, an upstart independent press that sells a one of a kind guided reading kit. Check out our samples at <http://www.stargazerpress.com> and pick up a copy for yourself or for your child's school today.

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