

Prereading Strategy Project

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RDG/515

January 17, 2011

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Reading is one of the foundational pillars of almost all learning, and teachers should incorporate it into every aspect of student education. Giving students interesting reading topics and projects to stimulate their curiosity in the subject matter can lead them into independent thinking about the topic. One effective method for “hooking” a student’s interest in a subject is for the teacher to formulate a prereading strategy. Vacca & Vacca, (2005) explain four reasons for the teacher to implement before reading activities “(1) motivating readers, (2) building and activating prior knowledge, (3) introducing key vocabulary and concepts, and (4) developing metacognitive awareness of the task demands of the assignment and the strategies necessary for effective learning” (Vacca & Vacca 2005. p. 233). In my Earth Systems 9th grade science class, I have developed a think-pair-share prereading strategy to stimulate student interest in the subject of the formation of the universe. My goal is to motivate, stimulate and captivate my students by ‘hooking’ them with the prereading article “Big Bang” by the BBC (2009), which probably goes against their preconceived ideas about the big bang theory.

This lesson is activated with a few stimulating questions. I ask students if they have heard of the big bang theory. The response is usually yes. Most students have at least some idea about the theory of the big bang by the 9th grade. At this point, I ask the students what they think the big bang was. The reason for this open question is to let a knowledgeable student teach her fellow students that the big bang is the explosion of small, dense matter into the formation of the universe. I know from experience if I try to push my teaching of the big bang at this introductory time, the theory can be met with resistance. If the students hear a widely accepted explanation from their peer, they are open to proceed forward. I then introduce the students to the think-pair-share method. I explain that the class will read the article, and then the students will pair up and discuss the ideas presented by the article. The pair will present three main points from the article

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to their classmates. I distribute the BBC “Big Bang” article (2009) and choose four different students to read the four paragraphs to the class. The students then pair up and discuss their ideas about the article. After a few minutes, the student pairs share ideas from the reading with their classmates.

Class discussion takes several minutes. I then ask the students if they think the same about the big bang theory as they did before they read the article. The typical response to this question is that they do not think the same way about the big bang theory. The article describes the big bang as an expansion of all matter; everything is moving away from everything else. The example used in the reading is baking fruit cake. The BBC “Big Bang” article (2009) uses a baking analogy [as the fruit cake bakes and rises, all of the fruit pieces move away from each other]. My next is to move start blowing up a balloon. I pick a student to help me with the demonstration. I give the student a pin and ask him to pop the balloon. The students love this part of the demonstration. I ask the students, is the big bang more like me blowing up the balloon or is it more like the student popping the balloon. Students will correctly answer that the big bang is more like me blowing up the balloon. Prior to the reading, they would have answered that the big bang was more like popping the balloon. I have found this prereading activity to be beneficial to student learning. I activate their prior knowledge about the big bang theory, introduce a new key concept of the universe expanding, and then capture their attention with a fun demonstration.

This prereading activity leads students to want to discover more about the theory of the big bang. I build student anticipation by explaining that the textbook has an impressive section about the big bang and the formation of the universe on pages 796 - 797. Students are then assigned a textbook reading, along with a couple of post reading questions. My experience with

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this prereading activity has been positive, and it helps to dispel any resistance to learning about the big bang theory.

Conclusion

The use of a prereading strategy is an effective tool in the development of any lesson plan. Creating a stimulating introduction to a new subject will go a long way in capturing a student's interest in the subject, activating her prior knowledge (schema) about the topic of study, and laying a foundation for new vocabulary and concepts that the student will be exploring. Vacca & Vacca, (2005) emphasize the importance of putting together a well thought out lesson plan, "the time teachers take to plan and organize active learning environments is time well spent. Planning appropriate frameworks for instruction may include the design of *text lessons* and *units of study*" (Vacca & Vacca, 2005, p. 231). The lesson plan framework is initiated with prereading strategies that encourage the students to activate prior knowledge, capture their attention, and introduce them to materials and vocabulary that will increase their understanding of the subject.

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